

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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MABEL'S PROGRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

BOOK I.

CHAPTER IX. MISS CHARLEWOOD IS DIPLOMATIC.

THERE are various ways of attaining that condition of mind and feeling which is, by common consent, described as "being in love." But for all these various methods one phrase serves—also by common consent. Men and women are said to "fall in love," and that is all; but is the process usually by any means so sudden as that expression would seem to imply? The modern sense of mankind, among men of European blood, makes the right to govern dependent, at least theoretically, upon the consent of the governed; and perhaps we have unconsciously introduced the principle into other spheres. At all events, I cannot but think that the blind god, whose "thrasonical brag of I came, saw, and overcame," our forefathers submitted to with an absolute obedience, has in these latter days lost somewhat of the halo of tyranny by divine right, and is often compelled to submit his credentials to the scrutiny of his subjects, like other and mortal monarchs. I think people can help being in love more often than is generally supposed, *n'en déplaît à messieurs les amoureux*, and that men may not only fall, but walk, trot, amble, gallop, and even lounge, into love. That they can be contradicted into it, I take to be beyond controversy. Nor can the spirit which protests against a prohibition it deems unjust, be considered an unreasonably rebellious one. The more Clement Charlewood pondered on his father's words respecting Mabel Earnshaw, the less his heart and conscience could agree with them or accept them as justly binding on his conduct. Supposing (he always put the case mentally as being a most improbable hypothesis)—supposing he *had* been inclined to admire and to—to—well, for the sake of argument say, to love—Miss Earnshaw. Was there anything in their respective positions which should reasonably make such a love improper or unwise? In every particular, save money, Mabel, it seemed to him, had the best of it. The Hammerham world knew, or might know, that his grandfather was an Irish bricklayer. Mabel

came of people in the upper half of the middle class: Mrs. Saxelby's father having been a country clergyman, and Mabel's own father a professor of chemistry, of some scientific reputation. Mabel was young, comely, clever, and a lady. (Clement sternly kept the list of her qualities down to the barest and most indisputable matters of fact.) And though the great firm of Gandry Charlewood and Son was rich and prosperous, there were risks as well as successes; losses as well as profits; and Clement, as a junior partner with a very small share in the concern, had yet his way to make in the world. Mabel was nearly seventeen; Clement was turned seven-and-twenty. In age, at all events, there was no inconvenient disparity. When he compared her mentally with the girls he knew, she came quite triumphantly out of the ordeal. She was superior to his sister Augusta in intellect, to Penelope in beauty and sweetness, to the Misses Fluke in everything. Not one of the Hammerham young ladies who frequented Bramley Manor had, Clement assured himself, Mabel's quiet grace and unobtrusive self-possession. He had seen her in her own home, and knew her to be affectionate and unselfish. What reasonable objection could his parents have to make against their son marrying such a girl as this? Surely, surely, Mabel would be the very pearl of daughters-in-law—one to be sought for diligently, and rejoiced over when found! "But as it is," said Clement, bringing his meditations to a close, "it is just as well that I have never taken it into my head to think of making love to her, though if I had the least suspicion that she cared a straw about me—but that's all nonsense, of course; it is the *principle* of the thing that I am contending for."

Mabel, on her side, was innocent of such day-dreams, either on principle or otherwise. I do not mean to say that she had no ideal hero floating in her brain whom she was one day to love and marry. But it was all very vague and distant. Mabel was free from coquetry, and had none of that morbid craving for admiration, no matter from whom, which makes some girls so ready to fall in love, and to be fallen in love with, on the smallest provocation. Certain it is that she had never thought of Clement Charlewood in the light of a possible suitor, and that she would have been immensely surprised to learn that his marrying or not marrying her had

formed a subject of discussion between him and his father. Her pride would have instantly taken alarm at any suggestion of the kind.

Now it was a shrewd knowledge of this feature in Mabel's character that led Miss Penelope Charlewood to undertake the diplomatic mission referred to in the heading of the present chapter. Mr. Charlewood had a high idea of his eldest daughter's good sense and practical abilities, and was in the habit of discussing family matters with her, very confidentially. On business, Mr. Charlewood never spoke to his "women folk," as he called them. "I earn the money, and they spend it," said he, "and I think they can't complain of *that* division of labour." Which sounded very magnanimous in Mr. Charlewood's opinion; but he forgot the consideration that absence of responsibility implies absence of power. Mr. Charlewood himself was fond of power, and jealous of it.

A few mornings after the conversation he had held with Clement in the dining-room, Mr. Charlewood was walking up and down the terrace at Bramley Manor, enjoying the sunshine and a cigar, after breakfast. Penelope was his usual companion in these morning strolls, Mrs. Charlewood being averse to walking under any circumstances, and Augusta eschewing any tête-à-tête with her father as much as possible. "For, I never know what to say to papa," professed Miss Augusta.

"You don't really think there's anything in it, Penny, do you?" said Mr. Charlewood. His meaning, literally rendered, would have been, "You don't suppose your brother Clement is such an egregious fool as to contemplate making a girl his wife who has not a penny in the world?"

"No, papa—nothing serious, that is to say; but I scarcely think I would have said anything to Clement about it, if I had been you."

"Why?"

"Why, papa, Clem won't bear too tight a hand, you know; you can't ride him with a curb."

"There was no talk of curbs, Penny; I simply expressed my opinion." Mr. Charlewood, having reached the end of the terrace, turned and paced to its opposite extremity in silence; then he said, slowly, "Do you think the girl has any notion of the sort in her head?"

"Oh, she'd be willing enough, no doubt," returned Penelope; but it may be doubted whether there was not more spite than sincerity in the speech.

"It won't do, Penny," said Mr. Charlewood.

"Papa, I think I can manage Mabel. She's as proud as Lucifer, and——"

"Proud, is she?" said Mr. Charlewood, raising his eyebrows.

"Preposterously proud. Mind, I like Mabel. She has salt and savour, and is worth a thousand every-day misses; but I don't want her for a sister-in-law. Now, if she had a hint neatly given her that Clement's family did not covet the honour of her alliance, she would fly off

instantly into some exalted region, and treat Clem coldly the very next time she saw him."

"Do you think so, Penny?" said her father, doubtfully. To him it appeared incredible that any girl should willingly relinquish such a chance.

"Yes, papa; I really do think so." And then it was agreed between father and daughter, before they parted, that Penelope should act in the matter as she thought best.

Accordingly, next day Miss Charlewood told her mother that she thought it would be kind to make a personal visit of inquiry at Jessamine Cottage, and suggested that their afternoon drive should be taken in that direction.

To Mrs. Charlewood a suggestion of her eldest daughter's came almost in the light of a command. Penelope had contrived to make herself considerably feared in the household, and her mother was perhaps more in awe of her than any one else.

"I shan't go," said Augusta. "I hate going to people's houses when there's sickness. You don't care a bit. I wish I was as unfeeling as you, Penny."

"So do your friends, I dare say," replied Penelope.

Miss Charlewood had taken care not to give her mother any hint of the errand she was bound on. "Mamma would say either too much or too little; and Mabel would be far too clever for her. We must keep mamma in the dark." This had been Miss Charlewood's decision as expressed to her father.

On their arrival at Jessamine Cottage, the ladies were informed that Mr. Saxelby was out, but that Mrs. Saxelby and Miss Mabel were at home.

"Out?" said Mrs. Charlewood to the servant-maid, raising two fat hands which were tightly compressed into bright yellow gloves: "Out? You must be mistaken. I thought he was too ill to leave the ouse."

"Master has been bad, ma'am, but he's been mending rapid these last two or three days; and to-day he is gone to the office for an hour or so."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Miss Charlewood; "we will see the ladies, if we may."

The visitors were ushered into the morning-room, and found Mrs. Saxelby and Mabel at work there. The former rose somewhat in a flutter to greet her guests. She knew herself to be a better bred, better educated, and more intelligent woman than the rich contractor's wife, and yet she could never repress a feeling of timidity in Mrs. Charlewood's presence. Not that the latter intended to be arrogant or insolent, neither was she loud in talk, or captious in temper; but Mrs. Saxelby was meek and weak, and Mrs. Charlewood's rustling satins and sweeping velvets—nay, even her very size, and the way in which her garments seemed to overflow the little sitting-room—oppressed Mrs. Saxelby with a sense of her own comparative insignificance.

Mabel, however, took the satins and velvets with perfect composure, and welcomed Mrs. Charlewood and Penelope in a thoroughly unembarrassed manner.

"What is this I hear, my dear? Your husband is out? We came expecting to find him ill in bed," said Mrs. Charlewood, panting into the room with a languishing air that five-and-twenty years ago had seemed to indicate fragile delicacy, but which now rather suggested apoplexy.

"Thank you very much for coming, dear Mrs. Charlewood. I'm glad to say Benjamin is wonderfully better—in fact, almost well. He persisted that he would take a cab and drive down to the office to-day. I'm afraid it's rather soon; but he was well wrapped up. Do take the sofa; and, Mabel, give Mrs. Charlewood that footstool."

Dooley, who had been standing with his small fist as far inside his mouth as circumstances would permit, and his brow drawn into a contemplative frown closely observing the visitors, now appeared to think it time that the general attention should be diverted in his direction, and, advancing to Penelope, said, gravely, "Do 'oo want to know how I do?"

"Very much indeed, Dooley. It's the thing I want to know more particularly than anything else."

Dooley surveyed her thoughtfully for a moment, and then asked, "Why?"

"Because I'm uncommonly fond of you, Dooley. You're my little sweetheart, ain't you?"

"No. I ain't fond of 'oo," returned Dooley, with uncompromising frankness.

"You rude little boy!" said his mother. "I'm ashamed of you."

"For goodness' sake don't scold him, Mrs. Saxelby," returned Penelope, who was no whit offended by Dooley's candour. "It is so wonderfully refreshing to hear anything one can thoroughly believe. Mabel, would you mind letting me look at your ferns? I'm so stupid or so impatient that mine all die, and I won't hear of letting the gardener touch them."

"You can see what I have; but they are poor enough. Why not let the gardener attend to them, Miss Charlewood?"

"Why not? You're as bad as Dooley. Because, if you must know, they'd begin to thrive under his auspices, and thereby prove my treatment to have been wrong; and I never allow any one to prove me to be wrong."

Mabel and Miss Charlewood walked together to a little glass house at the bottom of the garden, where Mabel had a few plants; the stiff silk cord round the hem of Miss Charlewood's dress swept over the daisies ruthlessly.

"What a lucky creature you are, not to have grown-up brothers!" said Penelope, suddenly, when the ferns had been examined.

"Am I? I hope I shall have a grown up brother some day, bless him!"

"Oh yes; but by that time you'll be out of

his reach. He won't be able to bully you. Your husband will have taken that department."

Mabel laughed. "Well," she said, with an arch glance, "I don't think you have much reason to talk of grown-up brothers bullying you."

"I? No; because I don't let any one bully me. I do that myself. But then, you know, I am a Tartar. Now, short of making up their minds to be Tartars, which is not altogether an easy line in life, girls do get bullied by their grown-up brothers. Watty and Augusta had quite a pitched battle the other day about Jane Fluke; papa took Watty's side, and Augusta was reduced to tears—always her last resort."

"About Jane Fluke?" said Mabel, rather surprised at Miss Charlewood's confidence.

"Yes; Jane Fluke is Augusta's latest craze, and Watty hates her. He accused her of coming to the Manor to set her cap at Clement, which is preposterous."

Any one to have heard the frank peal of laughter with which Mabel greeted this announcement, would have been quite satisfied as to her being fancy-free with respect to Clement Charlewood.

"What nonsense!" cried she. "Poor Jane! I'm sure she has no idea of such a thing. It is too bad of Walter to be so censorious."

"As to having no idea of such a thing," replied Penelope, dryly, "one can never tell. I should not be apt to accuse Jane Fluke of ideas, in a general way, myself. But, really, girls who are husband-hunting—however, papa made himself a little angry at the suggestion. You know papa is naturally ambitious for Clement."

"I don't suppose he need alarm himself in this case," said Mabel. She felt constrained and uncomfortable; she knew not why. Miss Charlewood's tone was unusual, and Mabel had a dim consciousness of some unexpressed meaning lurking under her words.

"No, of course not. Jane Fluke is out of the question. But Clem is a good parti, and there are prettier and brighter girls than Jane Fluke in the world, who might think it worth while to try for him. And then men are such fools! If a woman tickles their vanity, she may do almost anything with them."

"Mr. Charlewood should have some means taken of warning off the young ladies from his son, as they warn off poachers," said Mabel, with quiet disdain. And then the two girls walked side by side silently into the house.

"Why, I thought you had run away with Penelope, Mabel!" said Mrs. Charlewood, when they re-entered the sitting-room.

"No, Mrs. Charlewood, I will not run away with anything belonging to you," said Mabel.

And Penelope then understood that she had succeeded in her mission.

"I thought Mabel spoke a little short just now, Penny," said Mrs. Charlewood, when they were seated in the carriage on their homeward way.

"Upon my word, she is a first-rate girl, is

Mabel Earnshaw," was Miss Charlewood's very unexpected reply. "I like her spirit."

Miss Charlewood, having been successful, could afford to admire.

CHAPTER X. "TANTÆNE ANIMIS CÆLESTIBUS
IRÆ."

MISS FLUKE did not fail on the following Saturday to pay another visit to Corda Trescott, according to her promise; and having, in the mean while, learned from the Charlewoods that Mr. Trescott was employed in the orchestra of the theatre—which fact, it may be remembered, Mabel had not deemed it necessary to communicate to Miss Fluke—had gone to Number Twenty-three, New Bridge-street, for the second time, full of zeal for the conversion of the whole Trescott family from the error of their ways, and likewise with a very keen curiosity touching the terra incognita of a theatrical life: which curiosity she was determined to appease by a severe cross-examination of the unconscious Corda. On this occasion, however, she was doomed to disappointment on both points; for, on reaching Corda's home, she found that the child had been taken out by her father for a drive in a cab—supplied, Mrs. Hutchins volunteered to explain, by the liberality of Mr. Clement Charlewood.

"And I must say it credits him greatly," said Mrs. Hutchins.

Miss Fluke had found Mrs. Hutchins and her husband at dinner; but, not being troubled with any vain scruples of delicacy, had bade them not disturb themselves, as *she* didn't mind, and would talk to them while they finished their meal. To this polite encouragement, Mr. Hutchins, a tall round-shouldered dark-visaged man, with a melancholy and saturnine expression of countenance, had responded by carrying his plate, knife, and fork, into the washhouse behind the kitchen, and there finishing his dinner in solitude without uttering one syllable.

Miss Fluke's self-possession being quite invulnerable as to any such slight hint, she improved the occasion by energetically applying herself to draw what information she could from Mrs. Hutchins. Now that good lady had no cause of complaint against her lodgers, nor any real feeling of dislike towards them. Yet, had it not been for two restraining circumstances, she would have been willing enough to join Miss Fluke in lamentations over their lost condition; Mrs. Hutchins having that cast of mind that delights in gossiping animadversion without necessarily believing it in the least, and having a disposition (compounded of vanity and cowardice) to put herself in a favourable light with any interlocutor, by falling in with the prevailing tone of the moment. But I have said that two restraining circumstances prevented Mrs. Hutchins from giving way to the natural bent of her disposition. Of these, the first was, that her husband was still within ear-shot; the second was, that Miss Fluke's eyes, making their accustomed tour of inspection

round the kitchen, had unfortunately happened to light upon number ninety-seven of Rosalba of Naples, or the Priest, the Page, and the Penitent.

Miss Fluke instantly pounced upon the romance, and dragged it from beneath a dirty tea-tray, whence it had protruded sufficiently to reveal the title, and the upper half of a coarse woodcut, representing Rosalba poised upon the topmost round of the rope ladder, with her curls streaming in a high wind, and three ostrich feathers mysteriously unruffled by the elements, stuck at the back of her head.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Miss Fluke, clutching at the number, and holding it aloft before her. "Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear! what is this, Mrs. Hutchins?"

Miss Fluke pronounced her "Oh dears" with a crescendo which had a very terrible effect.

"Well, mum," returned Mrs. Hutchins, bridling, and feeling that she would probably be driven to bay, "that is a *perodical* novel as I'm a-taking in, in numbers."

"Ah! But," said Miss Fluke, turning full on the landlady with startling vehemence, "you *shouldn't*! Certainly not. You shouldn't on any account whatever!"

"Well, I'm sure!" muttered Mrs. Hutchins, "I don't see as there's any harm in it. I'm very fond of readin', and allus was, from a child."

"My good soul, that's all very well; but the great question is *what* do you read? Don't you see? It's of no use to tell me you're fond of reading, because that is no excuse for your feeding on the words of the Devil."

"Laws bless me!" cried Mrs. Hutchins, tossing her head contemptuously: "I'm sure you wouldn't say such nonsense as that, if you'd ever read it."

"If I had ever read it!" said Miss Fluke, with a spasmodic movement of her shoulders, and her eyes very wide open. "I've no time to read anything but my Bible. And I find my Bible sufficient."

Miss Fluke, in speaking of the Scriptures, always said "my Bible," and laid a strong stress on the possessive pronoun.

At this point, a smothered voice issuing from the washhouse, demanded to know "Where the jack-tow'l had got to?"

"My master's a cleanin' of hisself, an' I don't believe as there's a towel there at all," said Mrs. Hutchins, glad of the diversion, and hurrying out of the kitchen.

"Ah! There it is!" murmured Miss Fluke, mentally making Rosalba responsible for the want of cleanliness and order in the household presided over by Mrs. Hutchins. "No jack-towel! That's what drives the labouring man to the public-house."

Mr. Hutchins, however, emerging redolent of yellow soap from the washhouse, was apparently only driven on this occasion as far as the workshop of his employer; for he left the house with his basket of tools over his shoulder, and a square paper cap on the top of his black matted locks.

His better-half was by this time in no mood to receive Miss Fluke's lecture on the sinfulness of novel reading, with a good grace. She made several remarks of a biting and ironical character, to the effect that she had always supposed an Englishman's house to be his castle, wherein he might reasonably expect to be safe from the harrying of people who had nothing to do but to mind other people's business, and pry into other people's affairs; that this might be styled a religious line of conduct, by some persons, but that she, for her part, could find no warrant for it in the instructions she had received in her youth from pious parents and guardians, whose orthodoxy she would defy the most malicious to call in question. She further added, that she knew a lady when she saw one, having lived housemaid in good families before taking up with Hutchins. And she more than insinuated that she did *not* see a lady when she saw Miss Fluke.

All these remarks were pointed and emphasised, by much clashing and banging of the dinner-things: which Mrs. Hutchins proceeded to wash up in a manner so expressive of indignation, as to put the crockery in considerable danger of being dashed to pieces.

Then was Miss Fluke a spectacle to be seen, as standing erect and rigid in the middle of the kitchen, she launched upon Mrs. Hutchins all the thunders of her practised eloquence.

Miss Fluke braced herself for the combat with positive enjoyment. Totally without one sensitive fibre in her moral composition, and rendered confident by long habit and by the arsenal of Scripture texts from which she could draw at will, and which she flung with pitiless volubility at the head of her adversary—after the fashion of those modern cannon which fire off so many balls per minute—Miss Fluke was a wonderful and overwhelming spectacle, as she stood there, square and upright, her face crimson, her eyes staring, and her head shaking with the energy of her emphasis.

Mrs. Hutchins had entirely miscalculated her strength when she ventured to cope with such an enemy as this. She was thoroughly cowed and frightened, and proclaimed her complete discomfiture, by subsiding into a whimpering fit of tears.

Miss Fluke looked at her triumphantly. "I will come and talk to you again, Mrs. Hutchins," said she, seizing Mrs. Hutchins's reluctant hand, and shaking it violently. "We must be instant, you know, in season and out of season. It would never do for me to look on quietly and see my fellow-creatures go headlong to perdition, Mrs. Hutchins."

The way in which Miss Fluke pronounced the word perdition made Mrs. Hutchins shake in her shoes.

"I'm sure I should never ha' thought nothink of reading a novel," sobbed Mrs. Hutchins. "I've knowed lots of good people do it, and think it no sin."

"Ah-h-h! The old Adam, Mrs. Hutchins, the old Adam!"

"Who, mum?" said Mrs. Hutchins, looking up forlornly.

The poor woman presented a very woe-begone appearance by this time, having rubbed her eyes with a not over-clean apron, and ruffled her untidy hair until it stood up all over her head like tangled tow, with one scrubby tress sticking out behind, at right angles with her comb.

"The sinfulness of our corrupt and fallen nature," explained Miss Fluke. "You should read, instead of imbibing that *poison*"—with a terrible glance at Rosalba—"you should read some of those blessed and improving tracts that I left with the child Cordelia. Where are they, Mrs. Hutchins?"

It chanced that Mrs. Hutchins, having been attracted by the prints in Robinson Crusoe, had borrowed the book, unknown to Corda, and brought it down to the kitchen together with several of the penny tracts, which had been placed between its pages. She rose meekly to get the tracts from the dresser on which they were lying; but Miss Fluke anticipated her, and seized the volume and the tracts together.

"There!" she said, rapidly enumerating their titles. "The Reformed Convict. Sally Smith, the Scullerymaid. The Sinner's Fire Engine. Have you Taken your own Measure yet? Or the Complete Spiritual Tailor. *There's* reading for you, Mrs. Hutchins!"

Then, opening the volume of Robinson Crusoe, she examined the name written on the title-page.

"What's this?" she exclaimed, with the suddenness which was one of her most marked peculiarities. "To Mabel, from her affectionate—where did you get this, Mrs. Hutchins?"

"A young lady lent it to little Cordelia the other day. Mr. Clement Charlewood, he brought it for her, along with two or three more."

"Oh!" said Miss Fluke, intent on the writing on the title-page. "Indeed! The child had far better have read the tracts I left her. I shall scold my young friend," added Miss Fluke, with a grim smile.

Then she violently shook hands again with Mrs. Hutchins, and took her leave, with a promise to return as speedily as might be, to carry on the good work she had begun that morning. "And," said she to herself, as she stalked, flushed with victory, down New Bridge-street, "it's a special providence for all that household, that Mabel Earnshaw took it into her head to visit Cordelia. For, otherwise, I might never have gone there."

The account Mrs. Hutchins gave to the Trescotts of her interview with Miss Fluke was inaccurate in several important particulars; but it sufficed to excite a burning indignation in the breast of Alfred. The inaccuracies of which I am obliged to accuse Mrs. Hutchins were mainly the suppression of her own signal defeat and abject submission, and an exaggeration of Miss Fluke's pious horror of the Trescotts' calling in life. These were not only powerful in their action upon Alfred, but Mr. Trescott, too, chafed and fumed, and moved about the kitchen in a state

of excitement. Little Corda, who had returned, tired and sleepy, from her drive, was lying on her bed up-stairs, and had fallen asleep.

"Who the devil do they take us for?" said Alfred, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, and turning to his father.

"What can I do? Can I help it? Is it my fault?" returned Mr. Trescott, irritably.

"Well, yes; it is, partly. You sing so precious small to that snob Mr. Clement Charlewood. Ay, I could put Mr. Clement Charlewood up to a thing or two, high as he holds his head. He ain't the only member of his family with whom I have the honour to be acquainted."

"Law!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutchins, with greedy curiosity; "ain't he? Now, which o' th' others do you know, Mr. Alfred?"

The young fellow looked at her cunningly from under his long handsome eyelashes. "Bless your soul, Mrs. H.," said he, with a grimace compounded of a sneer and a smile, "I know all sorts of people. I tell you what, governor," he added, "I wish you'd take an opportunity of telling Miss Armshaw—Hamshaw—or whatever her name is—that we don't particularly relish or appreciate the society of the amiable lady she brought here to bully poor pussy-cat. By George, if I had been at home on the occasion of her first visit I don't think she'd have favoured us with a second!"

"I don't suppose it was Miss Earnshaw's fault," returned his father, laying a slight stress on the name. "I think she is a lady, every inch of her, from what Corda says."

"She's a remarkably good-looking girl, at all events," said Alfred, with magnificent approval. "And we know *she* can't come the Sunday-school-and-penny-tract style of virtuous horror over us. *That* wouldn't quite do."

Here catching Mrs. Hutchins's eager gaze fastened on his face, Alfred broke off rather abruptly, and stooped to pick up the volume of Robinson Crusoe which he had thrown on the floor. "There," said he, smoothing the leaves with his hand, "pussy-cat has read that, I know. Couldn't you take it back this afternoon when you go to give your lesson in FitzHenry-road? You might see Miss What's-her-name, and say a word to her."

This Mr. Trescott agreed to do, and, after dinner, set forth with the book in his pocket.

Mr. Trescott's pupil was a young clerk, who had a passion for the violin; and as his duties occupied him nearly all day, he could only receive his lesson late in the afternoon. It was therefore growing dusk when Mr. Trescott—after enduring with what patience he might an hour of ascending scales played sharp, and descending scales played flat, and the rasping of a very unsteady bow over the tortured strings—arrived at Jessamine Cottage. To his surprise, there was no light burning in the hall behind the little glass door. He often passed the house, and knew the punctual shining of the hall lamp well. He rang softly without obtaining any answer, and then again, and then a third time, before any one came. At last a dim light was

seen approaching, and the nursemaid cautiously unfastened the door, and peered out. "Who is it?" she said, in a whisper. "What do you want?"

"Could I see the young lady, Miss Earnshaw?" asked Trescott, surprised and uneasy at the girl's manner.

"Oh dear no," returned the servant. "Please to go away. They can't see nobody. We're in sad trouble here."

"Trouble! What's the matter?"

"Why, master died this morning, and missis, she's like a lunatic, a'most, with grief."

"Good God!" cried Trescott, falling back a step or two, "I had no idea of this. I thought he was better."

"Ah! so he were; but he went out too soon, and caught a cold, and got inflammation, and that carried him off in four-and-twenty hours. But I mustn't stay and talk. Missis heard the bell, and it put her in an awful twitter. I must go."

"Will you take this," said Trescott, handing to the girl the book he had brought, "and give it to the young lady when you have an opportunity, and say I am dreadfully distressed, and wouldn't have intruded for the world if I had known?"

Before he could finish his speech, the little servant had taken the volume from his hand, and closed the door. He heard her put up the chain, and then the glimmer of her candle disappeared up the staircase.

"Bless me!" said Mr. Trescott, passing his hand over his forehead as he limped away, "it has given me quite a shock. I didn't know anything of the man; but it's so sudden. Dear me, it's so awfully sudden!"

STOMACH AND HEART.

GREAT discoveries in science in modern times are made almost daily. Many theories, however, have descended to us from ancient times—chiefly because they are ancient—and no one takes the trouble to inquire into them closely to ascertain their soundness. Such is the case with the generally acknowledged and accepted doctrine, that the heart is the organ and seat of the affections.

We confidently affirm that we have made a grand discovery on this important question, this supposed physiological fact, though we have no pretence to be professed anatomists, nor can we say that we have gained our knowledge exactly in a dissecting-room.

It has been assumed that the brain is the organ of the mind—that it is the seat of the intellect—and that, if it be diseased or destroyed, the mind suffers with it. To that doctrine we offer no objection.

It has also been assumed, and has long been the prevailing opinion, that the heart is the seat of the affections; and we might quote, not only from poets and novelists, but from much graver and more sober literature, to prove easily that such

is the general belief. All the virtues and soft emotions, and also their opposites, are said to proceed from the heart: varying in degree and in character according to the goodness or badness of that belied organ.

Now to this doctrine we object; and not only do we consider the theory a mistake, and that it cannot stand the test of examination, but we meet the theory by the proposition that another organ is really the seat of the affections, and that the heart is not at all concerned in the matter. The organ we contend for is the stomach.

It is very true, and we at once acknowledge that we can bring no anatomical proof of our doctrine from the structure of the stomach, nor can those who might argue on the other side show any such proof from the anatomy of the heart. It is only by watching the actions of each, that light can be thrown on the subject.

True, when powerful emotions of love or hate have been excited, the heart's action is suddenly and often violently increased, the pulses beat fast and furious, there is a flushing of the face, and a blush. But this is only because the emotion disturbs the heart, as it does the respiration, and the same effect is produced from other than moral causes: as by running, jumping, or any violent and rapid bodily exercise: also, by a very hot room, or a glass of brandy. We might as well assert that the lungs were the seat of the affections; for they are disturbed by the same causes.

If the heart, as an organ, were the seat of the affections, and of all the tender feelings or their opposites, these feelings would alter and become morbid, if the heart were diseased: as we find the mind become disordered when the brain is wrong. It is well known that this is not the case.

There is a disease where the heart becomes enormously enlarged, but it is not found that the moral large heart, as it is called, is the consequence. A man is said to have a large heart when he shows a noble benevolence and a wide philanthropy; but his real heart, the organ itself, remains of its natural size, while possibly a miser who hoards up every penny, and never did an act of charity in his life, dies of an enlarged heart. The heart is sometimes found converted into a bony half-stony structure, causing much suffering during life; but the afflicted owner of this hard heart is often the kindest, the most tender, the most amiable, of human beings. It has been said of a very loving woman that she was *all heart*, whereas in reality her heart remains unchanged in size or in structure, and she retains the usual complement of legs and arms, and so forth. Many people have diseased hearts; these cases are easily recognised by doctors, by the help of that wonderful *searcher of hearts*, the stethoscope; but though they have the malady for years, getting gradually worse and worse, and though the progress becomes more and more distinctly marked, until they die of it, and a post mortem examination verifies the opinion given of the case, yet the affections have never been found to have been

impaired; the patient remains as good, as gentle, as loving, and as benevolent, as before the change began.

It remains, to prove that the real organ of these emotions is the stomach.

Here we can confidently appeal to facts daily seen and acknowledged. We can also easily show that in very old times this truth was well known and accepted, so that we are not broaching an entirely new doctrine, but one frequently set forth in the oldest literature. The Old Testament abounds in proofs that the digestive organs, of which the stomach is the most important, were recognised as those which influence the affections, and not the heart. Witness such expressions as "bowels of mercy," "bowels of compassion," "Joseph's bowels yearning towards his brother Benjamin." Many more might be quoted, as such phrases frequently occur, showing that the truth was well recognised in the days of the patriarchs. We do not pretend to be able to prove when the change of doctrine took place, or how it was that the heart came to supersede the original and correct organ.

When we see a lovely and bewitching woman, is it not common to say that we could eat her up? One love-stricken swain was known to have said this of his intended bride, but, some months after his marriage, on being reminded of it, he rather regretted he had not done it. Do not mothers often say, in a fit of ecstatic fondness, that they could eat a lovely cherub of a child? Benevolent feelings towards all mankind are notoriously promoted by a good dinner. Numbers of our charitable institutions depend on this recognised fact, and the subscription-plate is sent round, never before, but always after dinner. See the contrast between the amounts of the collections in a church plate, even after the most eloquent and touching of sermons (but *before* dinner), and those obtained at public dinners for the benefit of a hospital or a school!

Then again, to come to finer details, notice how happy, serene, and full of charitable feelings a man shows himself to be when his stomach is comforted, refreshed, and soothed by a well-dressed dinner of all the delicacies of the season; on the other hand, how snarling, how sulky, and ready to quarrel with the wife of his bosom and the children of his loins, is the man whose stomach has been offended by an ill-dressed, bad, and indigestible meal.

Then again, while love and tenderness exist unchanged in the man whose heart is seriously diseased or even actually ossified, a deranged or a damaged stomach occasions melancholy, disgust, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness.

Observe the effect of a sea-voyage on the stomach as the organ of the affections. A devoted young husband, on his wedding tour, crosses the Channel with his beloved bride. Watch him; all attention, all tender care to cover her with his cloak, to bring her a soft pillow, before the vessel quits the harbour; but when the tossing and pitching begins, and his *stomach* feels the horrid qualms of sea-sickness, he leaves the fair creature to her fate or to the stewardess, and is

savage if she implores him to bring her a basin or to hold her head. This change lasts only while his poor stomach is overset. As soon as that organ regains its normal condition, as soon as the boat steams into the harbour, his love, his tenderness, returns apace, and he is again devoted.

Byron recognises the truth very clearly, when describing Don Juan's voyage after his separation from his first love, the fair Julia :

He felt that chilling heaviness of heart
Or rather STOMACH, which attends
Beyond the best apothecary's art
The loss of love, the treachery of friends;

and again, further on, describing what stops love :

But worst of all is nausea—or a pain
About the lower region of the bowels.
Love, who heroically breathes a vein,
Shrinks from the application of hot towels,
And purgatives are dangerous to his reign,
Sea-sickness death.

Sambo, the nigger footman, made a mistake in his theory, but not in his instinct, when he refused to go and confess breaking the decanter until his massa had had his dinner, because by that time he would have eaten so much, that his heart would be pitched up close to his mouth, and therefore he would the more readily be mollified. The fact was correct as to the improvement of the temper from the filling of the stomach ; but the heart would remain in its usual position.

Good temper, kindly feeling, universal benevolence, are much influenced, as all will agree, by the state of the digestion. It is the stomach which digests ; therefore it is the stomach which is the organ of these emotions, and not the heart.

If the heart be diseased or out of order, and if the doctors be summoned, and by their remedies cure or relieve the malady, no change whatever can be seen in the moral feelings of the patient before or after. But when the dyspeptic patient who has had the blue devils, and has shown a morose temper and dislike to everybody and everything, has been set to rights by a little medical discipline—a dose or two of blue pill or a few draughts—he is restored to a genial temper, and become serene and happy.

From the days of the fattened calf, down to the present time, how do we welcome the long-lost son, the unexpected old schoolfellow, the returned hero ? By a feast ! And the universal way to cultivate the best affections is to feed them well.

There will be a considerable difficulty in overcoming the long-established prejudice on this point, and we must await the further enlightenment of the world, satisfied that in the end the truth will prevail. Poets especially will rebel against the *organic* change which ought to follow when the doctrine is fully recognised : as it will not be so easy for them to get rhyme for *stomach*

as for *heart* ; and, though both are equally parts of the frame, there will be, for a time, a sort of repugnance on their part to bring forward as poetical stock, what they will be pleased to call a more animal and a less sentimental view of the matter. One comfort is, that the fact will remain, and that it does not much matter what designation may be given to it. The man who fancies he is clasping to his heart the long-lost love or the returned child, when in point of fact he really holds the beloved object to his stomach, will not have made any very wide mistake, as the map of the two organs will show that they are situated within an inch of each other.

CASTLE AND COTTAGE.

I.

THERE stands a castle by the sea,
With an ancient keep and turrets three,
And in it dwells a lady rare,
Rich and lovely, with golden hair,
By the wild waves plashing wearily.

II.

In it dwells a baron bold,
Gallant and young, with store of gold,
Store of all that man can crave
To cheer his pathway to the grave,
By the wild waves plashing wearily.

III.

The lady bright is kind and good,
The paragon of womanhood ;
And her wedded lord is leal and sure,
Beloved alike of rich and poor,
By the wild waves plashing wearily.

IV.

There dwells a fisher on the strand,
In a little cot with a roof of land,
With his bonnie wife, and girls and boys
That climb to his knee with a pleasant noise,
By the wild waves plashing cheerily.

V.

And the lady of the castle sighs
When she meets the fisherwife's gladdening eyes,
And wishes that Heaven to bless *her* life
Had made her mother as well as wife,
By the wild waves plashing cheerily.

VI.

The lord of the castle, riding home
O'er the hard sea sand where the breakers foam,
Oft sees the fisher, his labour done,
Sit with his wife in the glint o' the sun,
By the wild waves plashing cheerily.

VII.

Sit with his wife, and his boys and girls,
Dandling the youngest with golden curls,
And turns his envious eyes aside,
And well-nigh weeps for all his pride,
By the wild waves plashing wearily.

VIII.

"I'd give," quoth he, "my rank and state,
My wealth that poor men call so great,
Could I but have that fisherman's joys,
His happy home and his girls and boys,
By the wild waves plashing cheerily.

OLD STORIES RE-TOLD.

JOHN THOM, ALIAS SIR WILLIAM COURTENAY,
KNIGHT OF MALTA, AND KING OF JERUSALEM.

IN 1833 a person who represented himself as Sir William Courtenay, a Knight of Malta, came to Canterbury and put up at the Rose Inn. This eccentric person was to be seen daily in the cathedral and in the public garden called the Dane John. He asserted himself as one of the "lions" of the fine old city. He could be seen this hour listening to the verger's narrative of Blue Dick's enormities, of how he rattled down Becket's "glassy bones" from the cathedral windows; the next, examining, with wild eye, Beowulf's cup of twisted glass in the museum in Guildhall-street. The wildest rumours were current concerning him. Sir William Courtenay was, in fact, a half-crazed fanatic from Truro, whom some accidental vagary led to sow mischief and misery in Kent. People of all ranks liked to converse with him; he seemed at home in the barber's shop or in the rich man's parlour. Some thought him mad, and tapped their foreheads sarcastically when they spoke of him. Others considered him winning, persuasive, and very eloquent, especially upon religious subjects or the wrongs and sufferings of the poor. He was often met on the road to Bossenden, or seen looking down from Boughton Hill at the green sea of hop-fields dotted with "oast" houses, the blue line of the ocean, Pegwell way, speckled white with sails, or the little grey cathedral, that from there seemed no bigger than a lady's casket. The wild district towards Faversham, called "the Bleau," once a forest, in which wild boars abounded as late as the Reformation, seemed also to have a special charm for this strange being. Its chesnut woods and its then rough ignorant debased population seemed to have a magnetic influence that day after day drew him from the old cathedral town. Men stopped their ploughs in mid-furrow, the hop-pickers laughing over their canvas troughs paused as the stranger with the long grave face, like the Italian type of our Saviour, passed by or harangued the half-savage people about their grievances. He was always amongst them. The turnip-hoers, the stone-pickers, as they rose from their task for a moment's rest, would often start (we are told) and find this man standing beside them as if he had suddenly risen out of the earth. All along the Stour valley, in many a gable-ended farm-house hidden up among clustering hops and wooded hills, this man from Canterbury, with the supernatural sort of face, was looked upon with reverence and awe as a prophet sent by God to make

bread cheaper and to redress poor men's wrongs.*

One Saturday morning the burgesses of Canterbury discovered, as they supposed, a solution of the secret of the mysterious stranger's visit. The county paper contained an advertisement from Sir William Courtenay, Knight of Malta, offering himself as candidate for the city at the coming election. The majority pronounced Sir William to be a mystery, probably rich, evidently religious, and ardent about popular grievances. His canvassing went on with extraordinary success; and the rival candidate grew alarmed, in spite of the encouragement freely given him by his own agents. The walls of Canterbury were gay with election addresses, when the tide suddenly turned, Sir William was indicted for perjury: which it was alleged he had committed in his over-zeal for a party of smugglers on the Kentish coast, whom he had thought to get off. He was tried at Maidstone—under his real name of Thom—for this offence, before amiable Mr. Justice Parke, on the 25th of July, 1833, found guilty of deliberate false testimony, and sentenced to imprisonment and transportation; being proved, however, to be insane, his sentence was commuted, and he was confined in the lunatic asylum at Barning Heath. Confinement, if it do not cure a madman, often intensifies his disease. A monomaniac especially feels the sudden loss of his liberty and the violent proclamation of the fact of his aberration. Moping, gibing, crazy faces surround him and claim him as one of them. His dream of an ideal heaven on earth, of revenge, love, invention, or wealth, is now barred from him, it seems, for ever. The mad world outside has leagued against him in their rage and despair at his true—intensely true—theories. It is hell on earth, to be thrown among mad people, as Daniel was among lions. All is darkness and blood around him—a darkness palpable, terrible, and teeming with life: as water under

* Mr. Ainsworth, in a note to Rookwood (1834), quotes largely from a contemporaneous pamphlet written on "Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay, of Hales and Evrington-place, Kent, and of Powderham Castle, Devon." It appears he entered Canterbury wearing a purple cloak, and girt with a sword, and attended by two pages in scarlet uniform. He was remarkable for flowing black hair and a black beard; his swarthy complexion was attributed to his travels in Egypt and Syria. He sometimes wore Italian and sometimes Oriental costume. He called himself Lord Viscount Courtenay, or Count Rothschild; in London he had been merely known as Mr. Thompson. Though said to be very rich, he was frugal, and at first seldom went outside the inn except to chapel. During the election he wrote many rhapsodies, and ended by challenging to mortal combat, in defence of "the truth," Sir Thomas Tylden, Sir Brook Brydges, Sir Edward Knatchbull, and Sir William Cosway, as "four cowards unfit to represent the brave men of Kent." He appeared on the hustings in Oriental dress, and hired the theatre to inveigh against tithes, taxation, and the new poor-law.

the microscope swarms with life. Perhaps he resolves to kill himself and end all by one quick movement of the knife, one leap from a window on the paving-stones, or a savage rush with teeth and hands at the keeper. One morning the madman will awake as from an opium dream. A great calm has fallen upon his mind; the waves are still; the sky is blue and serene; the vision is coming down—a broad beam of sunshine slants from the grated window to his bed. He leaps up and looks. Yes, yes! There, in the sun, stands the angel of Revelations, with the book in his hand, and the voice comes proclaiming John Thom a prophet of the Lord, sent through the world to lower the price of bread, and to work wonders, by fire and sword, until the unbelieving turn to him and acknowledge him as the chosen of Heaven. Nothing can shake this man now. He is the chosen prophet, and when the angels touch the doors they will open.

Four years he waits, and one morning the doors open according to the prophecy. Madness is cunning. Thom is silent about his mission of fire and sword; he is sane on some topics. He sees the angels leading him from the accursed place, but he does not speak of them, lest the madmen should thrust him back again.

His madness is no longer secret and mistrustful; it has risen to delirium, and his brain is on fire at the rapid approach of his avatar. Voices assure him from the great sunset clouds, red with the coming vengeance; voices rise from the hop-fields, from the flowers; the very birds proclaim him prophet and chosen; the brooks ripple out their welcome; the great angel in the sun waves a sword, every sunbeam leads him to victory and glory; yes, the moment will soon come when the sword of Gideon is to be drawn, the earthen jar crushed, and the light of warning and retribution flashed into the eyes of the guilty and the unbelieving.

The dangerous madman now takes up his abode at the house of a Mr. Francis, at Fairbrook, near Boughton. The saints can march thence quick upon Canterbury, and give the polluted cathedral to the flames, if such be the decree of the armed angel in the sun. In the mean time, Courtenay's wild ravings, strange threats, and insane vigils, are objected to, naturally enough, by the Francis family, and Sir William, enraged, goes to lodge with a man named Wills, in an adjoining cottage: where he can preach, and rave, and prophesy as he likes, if he only pays his rent regularly. Even money at last cannot, however, make his mad ways bearable. The noisy crowds of discontented country people that he collects and harangues day and night about the new poor-law become intolerable to tired men wanting rest after a hard day's work. He then betakes himself, with the air of an indignant martyr, to Bossenden Farm, which is occupied by a man named Culver.

The hour for the avatar at last comes. The wind, ruffling through a hop-field, would be signal enough for a man in that state of raving religious insanity. James Gorham, a constable

at Boughton-under-Blean and Herne Hill, at one o'clock on Sunday morning, May 27th, 1838, going into the street, saw Courtenay coming from Bossenden leading a grey horse which had a fleece thrown over the saddle. Courtenay wore a dark velvet shooting-coat, and had his hair, which was of extraordinary length, parted in the middle. About seven o'clock the same evening he was again seen coming down the Ville of Dunkirk; two men, named Tyler and Wills, were with him as professed followers and converts. Half an hour after, about one hundred persons had assembled at the cottage of a labourer named Kennett. The wild-eyed mysterious man with the long hair told the people that they might all go to work on the Monday, but that on Tuesday they must do nothing. He proposed a toast with some reference to the sufferings of the poor and the means of redressing them, and wanted a labourer's wife present to drink it also.

On the 29th, this mad fanatic entered Boughton-street, followed by four labouring men, George Branchett, William Burton, Thomas Browne, and Thomas Darton. As they passed the house of a man named William Branchett, Courtenay stops and says to the man who is looking out:

"Will you have a slice of bread?"

Branchett replies, "I want one."

Courtenay then says, "Come on, and I'll give you one." The man followed. The standard of the new religion is at last raised, the promise to the converts is an immediate meal of victuals, and future reforms as yet somewhat vague.

At Mr. Palmer's, a baker's, at Boughton, this Kentish Mahomet stops and buys four half-gallon loaves and some cheese; and at Smith's, another baker's, he buys two more loaves. The party then go up Staple-street towards Fairbrook. They stop at Mr. Wills's, being now fifteen or twenty strong, and Courtenay sends a man named Tyler for some beer. The food is then divided. After a rest of about an hour, the men are marshalled outside. The leader produces a white flag with a blue border, stamped with a symbolical rampant lion; Wills is appointed standard-bearer; while another follower, named Price, carries a pole with half a loaf stuck on it. The prophet has been sent to proclaim cheap bread, the general reformation of things, and death to all who oppose him. The grey horse with the mystical saddle-cloth is led by Thomas Browne. The conversation on the march is ignorant, wild, and fanatical. The men are suffering. They want help, they think this man means right, and will lead them to good. Courtenay advises them to leave off swearing, and tells them he wants nothing but what is right. "He talks religion," these rough ignorant ploughmen whisper, "as well as the parson at Boughton, or at Faversham either." He produces a Bible, and says:

"Here! This will bring us all home. I hope it will. I intend to follow it."

He speaks fluently, but not in a loud voice. Three times that day he makes them sing the hymn—

The Shepherd watches the sheep by night and day.

He constantly promises bread, meat, and beer to all who will follow him.

One of the men seeing the pole, says exultingly:

"Here's bread before us."

Courtenay: "Yes, there is."

Another one cries: "We'll follow that."

Courtenay: "Yes, follow that, and I'll ensure you more bread. I'll give you more." He then cried: "This is the 29th of May; I will have a jubilee; and any of you men who have no work to do, and like to go with me, I'll fill your bellies, and ensure you that nothing shall go wrong. This is the glorious 29th of May, and people shall have better cause to remember it than they ever had of remembering King Charles. The poor have been imposed on long enough."

Then, turning to Alfred Payne, a harness-maker who had come from Canterbury urged by curiosity, he broke into full insanity, not caring any longer to conceal it. At this time he had a bugle slung at his waist, and three of his men carried three suspicious-looking bags, probably containing arms.

"I am not a mere earthly man," he shouted. "I fell from the clouds, and nobody knows where I come from. I tell you, I can place my left hand on the muscle of my right arm, slay ten thousand men, then vanish and no one know whither I am gone."

A gentleman named Francis, dressed in black, being just then seen passing over a field in the distance, Courtenay said: "There goes one who wants stopping; he wants to know what we are about, but he is ashamed to come and show his face. He wants to know who wrote certain papers; he will know some day, but he won't live to tell." After this he told the men to fall in threes, and having sounded a trumpet, he said: "That voice was heard at Jerusalem, where there are ten thousand men ready to start at my command."

On reaching the Horse-shoe public-house, the madman said to his lieutenant, Tyler:

"Tommy, you go up to Gravening Church, and tell the people to stop there for their shepherd, till I come."

Courtenay and his four chief converts then left the band; on their return, Courtenay produced a pistol and fired it in the road; then reloaded it. The next march was to Watcham, where they entered the house of a man named Hadlow.

While Tyler said, "Sir William, I heard a man say the other night that you were a fool and a madman, and that he should not mind help taking you;" Courtenay said, "If any one comes to take me now, I am at leisure; but if they do come, I will try my arm. I have done nothing wrong, nor mean to. I came out for a day's pleasure to give these men bread. If they do come, I'll cut them down like grass. I'm sure that I could blow out the snuff of that candle as long as the pistol would allow." He had previously cried out incoherently:

"Now I am going to strike the bloody blow;

the streets shall flow with blood as they have hitherto done with water, and the rich and poor who do not follow me shall share the *fate of it*." (Of what?)

After this, the revolutionary army of the Kentish Mahomet marched on Goodneston, where a charge from two or three of Sir Brook Brydges's grooms could have dispersed them. The excitement was spreading towards Faversham. There were already rumours that the rioters had threatened to fire the stacks at Herne Hill. Courtenay demanded food for his friends, and it was given them at once: rather from fear than good will. At Dargate Common, the fanatic, getting every moment more assured of his own supernatural power, took off his shoes, and said:

"I now stand on my own bottom."

The party then went to prayers at Sir William's request, and then returned to Bossenden Farm, to sup there and to sleep in the barn. Gorham, watchful constable, prowling that night about Bossenden Farm, saw Courtenay about one o'clock come up from Calvert's house carrying a drawn sword, and wander restlessly about the meadows. At about two o'clock he came out of the yard, dressed in a hat and shepherd's frock, with a gaberdine on and a belt round his waist. Thirty or forty men followed him across the London road to Broughton-lane. They stopped at Branchett's house, knocked on the shutter, and cried:

"Halloo! Branchett, do you see it smoke?"

They then went to Sittingbourne (the old halting-place for pilgrims to Canterbury) and towards Sheerness; Sir William spent twenty-five shillings on a breakfast for his men, about whose food he took a jealous care. He fed them again at the George, at Newnham. At Eastling, Throwley, Lees, and Selling, he addressed the people, and held out to them hopes of some mysterious change, fatal to all who should dare to oppose it. They halted once in a chalk-pit to rest, and at night returned again to Calvert's farm, at Bossenden, to sleep.

In the mean time, Mr. Curtis, a perfectly practical and prosaic farmer who had never tried to see angels in the sun, and had never been shut up in lunatic asylums by perfectly mad keepers, having had his sowing and ploughing stopped by Sir William's leading away his men, had formally gone and applied for a warrant for their apprehension. Two constables named Mears, and a man named Edwards, having got a warrant from Doctor Poore, went to Bossenden House about half-past four on Thursday morning. The constables thought to trap the rioters asleep. But the fanatics were expecting the constables. At twenty yards from the house, Price and several other men, armed with clubs, shouted out that the constables were coming—to alarm their leader. A voice replied from the house:

"Is that them?"

A moment afterwards Courtenay came up and asked if they were the constables? The men replied they were. Courtenay instantly fired and shot one of the Mears, who fell

against the palings. He then pulled out a dagger and struck at the other, crying:

"You are the other!"

Sir William pursued him as he fled; but, stumbling, Mears got away and ran straight to the magistrates to tell them of the murder.

When he had committed this murder, Courtenay, now on the full road to the accomplishment of his ideal, cried out to his followers, "I'll show them!" He then, in a frenzy of delight, dragged poor Mears by the collar round the place; the dying man groaned, "I am not the constable." Courtenay replied, "You told me you were." He then turned him on his right side, so as to be able to strike him with his sword on the left side of the neck. He then cut him several times. After each blow Mears's head jumped up. Mears groaned; Courtenay then shot him through the body and killed him. He ordered four men to carry the body to an adjacent ditch. When they returned, the madman broke into a rhapsody of exultation. The work was going well. A second Gideon had come to slay the ungodly. Thus would perish all who opposed the prophet Courtenay; for so the angel in the sun had promised.

He stretched out his sword and cried:

"I am the only saviour of you all. You need not fear, for I will bring you through all."

The excitement now had become so general, and the menaces of Courtenay and his armed party were so alarming, that the county magistrates resolved on the instant capture of this dangerous maniac and his brutishly ignorant followers. At twelve o'clock, the magistrates came up to Thom and his party at a place called the Osier Bed. Courtenay's men threatened the magistrates and constables, with bludgeons and fire-arms. The Knight of Malta defied interruption, and discharged his pistol at the Rev. Mr. Handley, of Herne Hill, who, with his brother, attempted his arrest. He and his party then broke away to Bossenden Wood, and lay there in ambush: Sir William announcing his intention of shooting the first man who interfered with him. No means presented themselves by which the ringleader and his men could with safety be secured. The magistrates saw but one resource. To send at once for a detachment of the 45th Regiment from Canterbury barracks.

About twenty miles from Chatham, beyond the Ville of Dunkirk, near the head of the hill, there is a gate on the left hand leading into Bossenden Wood. Here, with bags of bullets and matches, the madman and his brutalised followers took shelter: as the outlaws of Wat Tyler's or Jack Cade's broken bands might have done centuries before. The madman was confident and elate. He only waited for the soldiers to rush on them, to fling some dust in the air, and call on the angels to come down. One of the men falls down before Courtenay in utter prostration of mind and body, and asks:

"Shall I follow you with my heart or my feet?"

Courtenay then fired off his pistols defiantly, and when he was told of the probable pursuit, cried:

"Let them come. I'll try my arm."

Bossenden Wood was pleasant that June morning. The sunshine overhead turned the transparent young leaves to a golden green. The thrushes were singing near their nests, the blackbirds piping to their fledglings. The sunlight glowed softly on the moss under the dappled hazel stems and the spreading roots of the great beech-trees, against whose clear shapely trunks these fanatics were standing. Round the wild-eyed man with the long flowing hair, watchful as robbers, they waited for the first gleam of scarlet among the bushes. Courtenay was to raise the war-cry of Gideon, and bear down irresistibly on the persecutors of the true prophet. Hitherto he had been victorious over all difficulties. He had won food for them. He had struck the constable dead. He had defied the magistrates. Soon the heavens would open, and a voice would be heard proclaiming the prophet. Then the rampant lion would pass on through England, and all would bow to the saviour of the poor. On every sunbeam that spread through the wood, lighting up the pathways of blue hyacinths and the mossy tracks sprinkled with violets, there were coming angels, Sir William told them, to cheer and to defend them.

It was a strange contrast, that beautiful wood, echoing with the innocent voices of the birds, and its new inmates — those frenzied men shouting hymns, brandishing bludgeons, and screaming fanatic prophecies of wrath and doom. Far away across the fields of hops, rank and luxuriant with their spring growth, there came, perhaps, the merry cadence of the Canterbury bells, pealing out for some gay holiday, and careless and mocking at the coming prophet.

A detachment of soldiers, their muskets on their shoulders, are on the march to Bossenden in careless order, hardly thinking it will be worth while even to fix bayonets to apprehend a madman and some twenty or thirty labourers armed with bludgeons. Their commander, Lieutenant Bennett, his sash across his breast, is speaking with the sergeant, and planning how the capture shall be made when they enter the wood. His thoughts alternate between Courtenay and the county ball the night before.

In the mean time, Courtenay has told Wills that the men must be well generalled. He had previously assured some of his followers that, though they might not believe it, the white horse he led was the horse mentioned in the Revelations. His wretchedly ignorant followers were prepared to believe anything now. After he shot poor Mears, he had cried out:

"Though I have killed his body, I have saved his soul!"

He raves (all cunning thrown aside), and the free current of his madness now breaks forth. His eyes roll, he waves his sword to heaven, he flings up his arms, he proclaims aloud his Divinity. It has been long enough concealed. Shaking off the great Spanish cloak that he had ordered to be thrown over him, to hide his pistols when any stranger passed, he shouts:

"I am Christ come down from the cross. Those who have faith can see the marks of the nails on the palms of my hands. I am the resurrection body of Gideon. I am your blessed Lord and Saviour. I can call fire from heaven, and can burn every one of you in your beds, and you are safer with me here."

Then, a moment after, he cries:

"Samson was a great man, but how do you know that a greater than Samson is not here?"

A line of scarlet shows between the tree-trunks. A hundred men of the 45th are dividing into two detachments to surround the wood. The Rev. Dr. Poore, Mr. Knatchbull, Mr. Halford, Mr. Baldock, the county magistrates, are with them. The detachment, headed by Lieutenant Bennett, and accompanied by Mr. Norton Knatchbull and the Rev. Mr. Handley, soon hear Courtenay hallooing and collecting his men in the wood, eager to show his supernatural power and to strike his enemies dead. He advances, calling out to them to behave like men. The prophet from heaven has now the moment he has long wished for. Fifty bayonets gleam before him; it is only a miracle can save him from their meeting in his breast if he dare fire a pistol.

The young lieutenant, with a fine sense of humanity and earnestly anxious to avoid bloodshed, stepped forward before his men and entreated the misguided people to lay down their arms and leave the madman, who had his gun to his shoulder, and was already aiming at the officer.

Sir William advances with perfect deliberation, as if to surrender, and then fires at Lieutenant Bennett, who instantly falls dead. Again victory! The prophet will save his own. But the soldier who covered Courtenay as he stepped forward, touches his trigger; there is a jet of fire, and the prophet falls dead. A sunbeam will come and touch his lips (he had said), and he will rise again and lead his followers to victory. Half maddened, Courtenay's followers rush at the soldiers, and the soldiers fire on them before they can grapple. Then comes one of those savage up-and-down hand-to-hand battles for life, fought with all the ferocity that poachers and gamekeepers display. Bludgeon against gun-stock, knife against bayonet; but the prophet does not rise from beside the young officer he has murdered. A sunbeam fell upon the face of the dead prophet. On that swift path from Heaven had come not the Angel of Blessing but the Angel of Death, and the soldiers otherwise falsify the prediction with great completeness. The soldiers, besides having their leader shot, have their second lieutenant severely wounded, and George Calt, a constable of Faversham, killed. On the fanatic side there were seven killed: Edward Wright, of Herne Hill; F. Harvey, of Herne Hill; C. Branchett, of Dunkirk; W. Burford, of Boughton; W. Foster, of Herne Hill; Thomas Griggs and D. Wry, of Herne Hill.

Among the persons seriously wounded, many of them dangerously, were Stephen Baker, R.

Hadlow, A. Toad, J. Griggs, W. Willis, C. Wright, S. Curling, J. Spratt, and Sarah Culver.

This woman was probably the author of some ill-spent rhapsodical verses (smeared with blood, and perforated by the bullet that gave the death-wound) found in the breast-pocket of Sir William Courtenay's coat:

Is it a delusion? No, it's peace I hear,
As yet welcome sweet guest.

A passing spirit softly whispers
Him safe from harm—and when
The loud clash of war's alarm attacks
Him, and boast the tyrants proudly
Round him, still his manly heart
Shall know no fear.
Then sink not, oh! my soul, nor
Yield to sad despair; the cause is
Great that calls thy lord away.
A sinking spirit and a silent
Tear but ill become the child
Who from the bonds of Satana
May go free.

A New Testament and a purse were also found in the pocket of Sir William Courtenay by the surgeon who examined the body. The purse contained a sovereign and threepence.

At the Maidstone assizes, in August, William Price, aged thirty, and Thomas Mears, alias Tyler, were indicted, charged with the wilful murder of Nicholas Mears, at Ville Dunkirk, on the 31st of May, 1838.

The indictment charged John Thom, alias Courtenay, as principal in the first degree, and the prisoners at the bar as principals in the second degree, by aiding and abetting the said Courtenay to commit the murder. In a second count, the parties were all charged as principals in the said murder. The Honourable C. E. Law, Mr. Serjeant Andrews, Mr. Channell, and Mr. Bodkin appeared for the prosecution; Mr. Shee and Mr. Deedes for the prisoners. The prisoners pleaded not guilty.

Daniel Edwards, the petty constable of the hundred of Boughton, deposed that as soon as Nicholas Mears was shot, he fell back against the rails. Some one said, "That is not the constable," and then Courtenay struck at John Mears with the dagger. Mears stepped back, and he missed him. When Courtenay came back, Nicholas Mears was alive, and said, "Oh dear, what can I do?" Courtenay said, "You must do the best you can;" and, having cut him three times across the shoulders, walked away. I then ran away towards the wood. As soon as I reached the wood, I heard the report of a pistol.

Cross-examined. When John Mears was running away, the prisoner Tyler made a sign for me to make my escape.

George Hawkins, a labourer, proved that when they were at Bossenden House they had a supper served out to them. Courtenay and Tyler assisted in serving the party. Courtenay told us to sleep at the cottage, and that he would come the next morning. I went there. We were called about three o'clock. When we got up, we went to Sittingbourne, where we had breakfast, and then to Bossenden. When we were at Green-street, both of the prisoners were

with us. We had supper at Bossenden, and again lay down there. We had a flag with us when we went to Sittingbourne, and most of the men had clubs. We got up about seven o'clock on the Thursday morning. In about half an hour I saw Nicholas Mears. On hearing a pistol fired, I looked round, and saw Nicholas Mears falling. Courtenay at the same time was running after another man, who made his escape. After this, I came round to the little court. Courtenay chopped the man with his sword, and fired another pistol. I saw the body removed. They carried it some little distance, and then put it down by a ditch. We afterwards went in and sat down to breakfast. Courtenay and the prisoners were of the party.

Another witness deposed that Courtenay appeared to be well versed in the Scriptures. "He asked three times on that day if we should like to sing a hymn. The hymn which was sung began thus: 'The shepherd watches the sheep by day and by night.' I had heard it sung at the chapel several times before. Courtenay then said he would conduct us right, and I believed he meant to do so. I do not, I am sorry to say, know much about the Scriptures. I wish I did. I can read, but cannot write. I have heard the same things from the clergyman at church. I think we all thought more of the religion he was telling us of, than of his person. He showed us a Bible, saying, 'Here, this will bring us all home, and I hope it will. I intend to follow it.' He spoke very fluently, but not in a particularly loud voice. He said at Wells's that he would give us bread and beef. I have lived thirteen years in the parish. Mr. Wright is the clergyman, and lives close to the church. When I was born, there was not any school at Boughton for youth. I was put to work very young. My children go to school."

Jacobs, a constable, produced the Spanish military cloak worn by Courtenay found in Bossenden Wood; also, a bag containing one hundred and fifty bunches of matches and one hundred and forty bullets of various sizes. Edward Arnot, another constable, produced a sword and pistol found in the wood, and a bag containing a loaded pistol, powder-horn, one hundred bunches of matches, a Bible, and a pistol-belt.

Mr. Shee, who defended the prisoners, called no witnesses; but fenced ingeniously as to the legal definition of the ugly word murder.

Price and Mears were sentenced to death, but were not executed: the former being transported for ten years, and Mears for life.

In the dark ages, when the serfs were groaning at the barons' feet, worse fed than the nobles' deer, worse treated than the knights' hounds, with no hope in life, and no moment to long for so much as that of death, a madman like Courtenay might have set half England in flames, have burned Canterbury, and sacked London. When the black death or the sweating sickness was devastating England, or during the convulsions of the Reformation, Courtenay could easily have gathered an army

of ignorant peasants together, and have worked incalculable evil.

These Canterbury riots were a dreadful revelation of the degraded ignorance in which the highly civilised English landlords of the nineteenth century allowed the tillers of their fields and their out-door servants to remain. Here were gentlemen, close to a cathedral town crowded with well-paid clergy, permitting generation after generation of people to grow up ignorant and gross as the cattle they tended, unable to read and write, therefore incapable of advance or improvement, unable to lift themselves from the slough of poverty and debasement, and so ignorant of the simplest truths of Christianity, that they could risk their lives in following a man from a madhouse, who pretended to be at the same time Gideon, Samson, and Jesus Christ; who asserted that he had fallen from heaven to reduce the price of bread; who declared that he could draw fire from heaven, and who actually, unhindered by them, shot a poor constable who had not even tried to arrest him.

Well might O'Connell, when taunted with the obstacles that the Roman Catholics always throw in the way of education, point with a sneer to this outbreak of the lowest and most debased form of fanaticism within sight of the great Cathedral of Canterbury.

POOR PLAY-GROUNDS.

HALF a year ago, a piece of ground in a very wretched court in Marylebone was bought for a play-ground for poor children. A desolate, dirty, untidy, bit of ground it was. Here and there, lay great stagnant puddles; between them forlorn-looking heaps of rubbish. A cooper used one corner for his barrels, and the smoke from his fire blackened the tumble-down wall that bounded the space on one side. A stable and shed stood in another corner; blocks of timber lay about the ground. A fence, much dilapidated, separated this space from a footway leading past four little cottages to a fifth, which stood in its own small yard. It had been a stable once, and retained its paved floor; the harness-room was the sitting-room, with its small window as high up as ever; the lofts were the bedrooms where the family and the many lodgers slept. The first time I saw those rooms they were clean, but very close. "Does not that open?" I asked, pointing to a casement window nearly blocked up by an enormous nettle-leaf geranium. "Oh yes, miss," replied the woman of the house, "but it's shut now for the season. The days are getting cold." The little yard was full of creatures—hens, rabbits, doves, dogs—all, so near the houses as to be very unhealthy.

When the purchase of the land and cottages was completed, and the land was cleared of stable, timber, and cooper, it presented even a forlorn aspect. The wild dirty ragged boys, no longer awed by the former occupants, trooped into it through the broken palings; the neigh-

hours began to carry off the fence for firewood. Orders were given to take the fence down, to prevent this thieving. It was broad daylight on an afternoon in spring, when an old man set to work to execute the order. The surrounding cottagers, seeing their spoil vanishing from their grasp, seized upon the man, and snatched the wood from him. The old man, in describing the scene, said, "They nearly killed me; and what was worse, they a'most broke the window."

To enclose the ground with a good brick wall was the next thing to be done. Bricks were ordered in; a quantity were stolen in the night. The Police said, "Unless we keep a regular watchman on, they will be taken between times, and one person screens another, so that it is impossible to discover the thief down there."

The children did much harm by throwing the bricks about and breaking them; having once been tolerated on the ground, they could not understand the rights of private property. One great dirty urchin set his back doggedly against a wall, and said to me: "I've been on the place oftener nor you, and I shan't move for you."

I visited the court very often while the wall was building, and I saw the habits of the people. They were very late in the morning. Those women who were not milk-carriers lounged about, gossiping, during much of the day; they sat or stood at their doors doing nothing for whole hours together. Even great boys played at pitch and toss at mid-day. Many of the children never entered a school, and were in every one's way, and always in mischief. Towards evening the court would become more lively. It often reminded me of a place inhabited by animals that prey at night. A greater activity and watchfulness seemed gradually to animate the people, and they came buzzing out in numbers. They seemed, too, as if living in a land of savages, being obliged to hold their own by strength and violence. In reply to my questions why the front doors of two of the cottages were shattered, and the windows and plaster broken, while the two next were, comparatively speaking, in good repair, the answer was given that rather more decent tenants inhabited the less dilapidated houses, and also that one woman in them "wouldn't let the boys touch *her* place." Particular people were pointed out to me as being "a match" or "not a match" for the boys.

The wall being built, and the ground levelled, invitations were issued to the girls of the neighbourhood to attend on a given day, when the place was to be opened as a play-ground. A maypole was procured, and covered with flowers; flags were hung on the walls, and they were also decorated with great green boughs. The roofs and windows of the surrounding houses were crowded with spectators, and the fortunate possessors of tickets entered the play-ground. The clergyman of the district had signified his interest in the scheme, but was unable to attend at the opening. A short address was given to the children by a clergyman from a neighbouring

parish, in which he explained the object of the plan, and the regulations which had been made. The play-ground was to be open when the neighbouring schools were closed; during the summer months from four to eight o'clock, and all day on Saturday. A ticket of admission was to be given to any girl paying a penny, which ticket was available for a week. Tickets were transferable, but would be forfeited by children behaving ill.

So slight was the knowledge of any regular games among these children, so ignorant were they of songs, so small was their power of self-control, that it was well-nigh impossible to amuse them. A game of the simplest kind would be started one minute, the next minute it would be abandoned, and a fresh game was commenced, to be as speedily discontinued. It was the same with songs. One song begun by a small fraction of the party would be lost in a discordant fragment of another song commenced by another fraction. Still the bright flowers, the gala look of the place, the never-ending delight of skipping, and the wonder and joy the toys awakened, made the children happy.

At departure, it had been arranged to give each girl a cake and orange as she passed out. But the surging crowd swarmed round me like an eager troop of wolves. I clapped my hands and bade them stand back. No visible effect was made by the command. Then I recollected that there were a few of the children of my own tenants in the crowd, so I said, "I am astonished *you* should press forward like this. Let those who know and trust me, go at once to the back and set an example." In a moment my own girls fell back ashamed. Others caught the spirit and retreated, and the whole distribution was managed easily.

At first there was no regular superintendent of the play-ground. We had no choice but to nominate as doorkeeper, a woman who lived on the spot, but whom we knew to be utterly incapable of being any way the guide and guard of the children. The wild disorder which ensued when the few ladies left who were able to visit the ground, was dreadful. The girls knew vulgar tricks and low songs, and how to tyrannise over those smaller than themselves, and how to tease those better dressed, and how to fight and swear, and knew little else. Within a fortnight it was found necessary at any cost to engage a woman who would really be a good superintendent. Fears were entertained that the person selected might have too little authority, as she was eminently gentle; but she has really gained the hearts of her little subjects, and they obey her more than we had believed possible. She invariably appeals to good motives in the children—to their honour, gratitude, affection, duty. Life among such people is apt to deaden our faith in gentle or generous feeling; it seems so hopeless to appeal to it when there is so little sign of its presence. Vanity and fear seem such easy motives to work with, until at last, when we have strengthened them by repeated appeals, they rise like giants to war against all those right actions in behalf of which we have

summoned them, and they become too strong for us. If appeals be made continually to a child's fear, how can scorn of pain or sorrow be expected, when right deeds have to be done in spite of difficulties? To cultivate cowardice, and expect moral courage, is very curious.

The play-ground has now been open some months, and it has already done much for the court. There, at least girls can play in safety, free from the temptations and interruptions of the streets. There, many a time last summer might be seen a group of happy children sitting out in the bright sunlight, threading beads, or making wreaths of flowers, or little bags, pin-cushions, flags. The place might look forlorn to most eyes, and it was inconvenient to sit on the ground; but it was a little kingdom of our own, where we could play in peace, and learn gradually to use our fingers for making, not destroying. Here, too, any lady who wanted to find out desolate children and give them a little treat, might always find them. A kite, a doll, a ball, were sources of inexhaustible delight.

Perhaps our expeditions were as great sources of pleasure as anything. Small parties went out to row in the park; and little creatures went, who had never been in a boat, and had never noticed the laburnum or hawthorn blossom. We have gained admittance, too, for a few children to the Zoological Gardens sometimes. The ignorance shown is almost incredible. After riding on the camel, and watching it a long time, a girl of nine years old asked me if it were alive! Another child of about the same age, seeing the little clock-tower over its house, asked: "Does the camel go up there of a Sunday to church?"

Soon after the play-ground opened, I took four girls to Hampstead Heath. At first they were shy, and said little. They expressed a great dread of wolves. I reassured them by giving them an account of the destruction of wolves in England, and by saying very positively, in answer to their questions, that I was quite sure it was long before their mothers were born. They then expressed certainty that there would be bears. "No," I assured them, "none at all. Yes, I had often been there, and had never met any bears." Experience is the only thing upon which these children rely. Their last fear was, that gipsies would carry us off—six people at three o'clock of a spring afternoon at Hampstead! Satisfied at last, they abandoned themselves to natural enjoyment. The flowers, trees, animals, all were sources of wonder and pleasure, as we pointed them out. For some time I could talk to them and interest them; at last, wearied, I left them to talk among themselves. Of the foulness of their talk it would be impossible to write; of the death of all sensitiveness, and substitution of the love of horror for the love of beauty. The least awful part of it was a description of all the bodies that had been taken out of the Paddington Canal when last cleaned, gross descriptions of their appearance, and gross speculations as to their histories. The long curved line of trees in the first glory of gold-green foliage, showed,

between their as yet thinly covered branches, a mist of blue distance, at which I sat and gazed; and somehow the natural beauty made me feel with a deeper awe the pollution of these young human spirits. So I have often returned, after some hours in the court, with so vivid a sense of the savagery of the people there, that the commonest civilities among educated people have seemed to me lovely. I have been even struck by the graciousness of girls handing things to one another at table.

The swings which have been erected in the play-ground by the kind help of friends, have been sources of constant amusement. The walls have been whitewashed, and gravel has been laid down; and though the place still looks bare, and though the untidy and dirty habits of the people make it almost impossible to keep it habitually neat, yet it is like a redeemed land compared with what it was.

It is not the place here to speak of our tenants and the alterations in the cottages, for which, as well as for the entire sum required for the purchase of the play-ground, we are indebted to Mr. Ruskin. I must confine myself to the play-ground. We want fellow-workers greatly. The work requires to be done by constant personal teaching and direction. We want people to teach the children songs; to teach them to draw; to bring them things to look at. The whole world of nature is a blank to them. Shells, flowers, seaweed, the commonest objects of the country, are new and interesting to them. Presently we hope they will all go to school; but when they do, if they come out at four o'clock on a summer's evening without resources, and without space, and without guidance at home, the day's teaching will be counteracted in the court. One principle we have had carefully to observe in all our dealings with the poor. Hold back your hand from gifts of things they expect to have to provide for themselves. Do so for two reasons. First, that you may encourage in them, foresight, energy, and self-control. Add largely to their savings, if you will; give them materials, if they will manufacture them; above all, employ them, if you can. Secondly, if you will steadily refuse to give, you will drive yourself and others to face the question, Can a man live on the wages we pay him? Private charity may back up for a time a hollow state of things, as the system of out-door relief in aid of wages did; it may eat out our manhood and womanhood, our self-reliance and our providence; but it cannot make brave, healthy, honourable citizens. Let us give up the plan of screwing down our payments for work done, until a labourer can barely subsist on his wages while all goes quite smoothly with him, and stepping in with our charity when we happen to be touched by the sight of want.

It is often hard to refuse gifts. Let any one who resolves to try this hard path be consoled by the remembrance that it is not by any means one in which the need of self-sacrifice is abolished. There remains almost more to be done when no such gifts are made: the difficulties of finding work for those who want it are greater,

often much greater, than those of almsgiving; the self-control necessary to refuse a gift is often twice as great as that required to give. I once feared that the refusal to give might appear very harsh, and might cloud the hope and faith of the poor. But I now believe that the gifts of counsel, of sympathy, of unwearied energy to imagine and start any self-supporting plan of help, of loving memory of the wants of the poor, of gentle sorrow in their wrong-doing, of large hope for those of them who fall lowest and wander furthest, will bear as bright and clear a witness to them of God's love and God's ways as any goods or money-gifts, however generous.

TWELVE MONTHS OF MY LIFE.

IN TWELVE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER VIII.

THE letter was for Miss Ashenhurst, but Miss Pollard, who was nearest the door, took it from the servant, and handed it to Sylvia.

"It is from Dr. Strong!" said the little lady, dropping into the nearest chair, and opening her round eyes in wonderment. And I heard her murmuring while Sylvia read the latter:

"Advice about Mattie—not time to call—does not approve of her walking about the garden with a crutch. He might have waited till to-morrow, and spoken to me."

But Sylvia sat grave and silent, with the letter spread on her knees. She looked so shocked that even I began to feel surprised, and Miss Pollard went red and pale, and twitched at the lappets of her little widow's cap.

"My dear," she said, looking at Sylvia with tears in her eyes, "we are naturally anxious to know what is the matter. Pray set our minds at rest by assuring us that this is not danger, or worse. If it is illness, he may recover; but tell us that he is not dead, my dear—tell us that he is not dead."

I do not think Sylvia heard, for she took no notice of the little spinster's speech.

"Well," she said, slowly and thoughtfully, "I never dreamed the poor man was so seriously in earnest."

"In earnest about what?" I said.

"Why," said Sylvia, "it is not fair to tell, but I am so much astonished that I cannot hold my tongue. You must both promise me to keep the secret. Well, then, here is a proposal of marriage from Dr. Jacob Strong—kind, good, simple man that he is!"

I glanced at Miss Pollard. She sat bolt upright in her chair in speechless dismay; but presently she got up all trembling and most piteous to behold, and came across the floor to Sylvia.

"Miss Ashenhurst," she said, "will you allow me to look at the envelope? These mistakes have been known to occur. He may have been writing to you also about Mattie, and may have put yours into my cover, and mine into yours."

Sylvia looked at her first in surprise, and then a comical look, half compunction and half amusement, came over her face.

"Miss Pollard," she said, "why do you suppose that this letter was intended for you?"

"Miss Ashenhurst," said Miss Pollard, "I

have heard of such things as flirts, who have fooled many women, but I do not believe that a respectable man like Dr. Strong, with a high reputation in the country, would be capable of making love to two ladies at once. My dear, I know that I am a middle-aged, ordinary woman, and should never dream of entering the lists with a young and beautiful creature like yourself; but when first one letter and then another comes dropping into one's lonely life with words of love and comfort that one never thought to hear; when, in spite of one's silence and slowness to believe in the change, these letters keep perseveringly coming to one's fire-side; then, my dear young lady, even at my age, one will begin to forget one's wrinkles and common sense, and to look forward to events which one would have laughed to think about but a short time ago."

Sylvia looked up at the bright proud little simple face, then dropped her head abashed, and said penitently:

"Miss Pollard, I am very sorry indeed. I should never have done it if I had foreseen how things were to turn out. I hope you will forgive me, but it was I who sent you those letters."

"My dear, no!" said Miss Pollard, mildly, feeling in her pocket, and producing a note. "These came from Dr. Strong, Mattie will assure you. You may compare the handwriting if you wish."

And the little spinster opened her letter with trembling triumphant fingers, and seemed to feel herself happily fit to cope with this new piece of quizzing from Sylvia.

"I am very sorry, Miss Pollard," repeated Sylvia, "but I copied the writing, having a letter of Dr. Strong's in my possession. That note was written by me, as well as all the rest you have received. It was a silly hoax."

Miss Pollard stood folding at her letter for some moments, then seeming to take in the truth, dropped the paper in Sylvia's lap, and moved away quickly. She kept her face turned from us as she crossed the room to the door, but I could see the cruel quivering of the contracted face, and I grieved for the kind little wounded heart. By-and-by, she came back equipped for departure, with her bonnet put on the wrong way, the deep silk curtain dipping over her wet patient eyes.

"Thank you, my love," she said, when I put it straight. "I had no wish to see my foolish face in the glass, and I did not feel it wrong. It does not much signify."

Then she went up to Sylvia, and held out her hand.

"Good night, Miss Ashenhurst," she said, "and I hope you believe that I forgive you. I know that old maids have always been sport for the young, and perhaps it is natural that they should be so. We have all our crosses to bear, and I nourish no ill will. Forget, if you can, the humiliation you have caused me this evening, and be a good wife to Dr. Strong."

"I am very sorry I pained you," said Sylvia; "but I am not going to marry Dr. Strong."

"Not going to marry him!" echoed Miss Pollard, and now at last her meek eyes began to kindle fire. "Dr. Strong is not a person to be played with and thrown aside."

"Perhaps not," said Sylvia, carelessly. She was tired of the conversation, and was not going to submit to be lectured. But Miss Pollard would not overlook the doctor's wrongs so easily as she had done her own.

"Miss Ashenhurst," she said, her whole little person quivering with indignation, "you have done wrong, you have done very wrong. Doubtless you have been at a loss for amusement, but the sad humbling of one foolish woman might have been enough, without the grieving of a worthy heart like that which has been offered to you, and which you so carelessly fling away. I am speaking to you freely, Miss Ashenhurst, because I am angry. Your conduct since you came here has been most unworthy; your behaviour with Mr. Elphinstone, in spite of his engagement to Mattie, is talked of in the village. Such ways may do for London, but they are not admired in simple places like Streamstown. I shall bid you good night, Miss Ashenhurst. I have not been so angry for many years. I am sorry I have had to speak to you so plainly. Good night, Mattie, my dear, and I wish you could contrive to infuse a little of your honesty into your friend."

And with this the little lady bounced out of the room, and out of the house.

It seemed a long time after she had gone before Sylvia spoke to me. While Miss Pollard had talked of herself and the doctor, Sylvia had sat studying the carpet and tapping her foot. When Miss Pollard said, "Your behaviour with Mr. Elphinstone," Sylvia's face had flushed crimson, and she had lifted her head to speak angrily. When Miss Pollard said, "in spite of his engagement to Mattie," Sylvia's dilated eyes had fixed themselves with an absent look of perplexity on the opposite wall, while gradually the indignant glow faded from her forehead, her cheeks, and her lips, and she sat paler than I had ever seen her, studying the carpet as before.

It seemed five minutes before she spoke. I dare say it was not so long.

"Mattie," said she at last, "what was it that fiery little woman said about Luke?"

I had never felt such a coward in my life before. I had never been so utterly at a loss to know what to say.

"Did you not hear what she said, Sylvia?" I stammered.

"Had I been sure I heard rightly, I should not trouble myself and you with the question," returned she, so sharply, it hardly seemed possible it could be Sylvia who was speaking. "You do not seem to wish to repeat what she said. I thought she spoke of an engagement between you and Luke. She or I must have been wrong. It is not possible that such an engagement could exist."

"It is quite true. Such an engagement has existed for the past six months. I ought to have told you about it," said I, stabbing her involuntarily in my trepidation.

"You ought to have told me about it," she echoed, laughing, with a spasm of pain upon her face. "Hear her! how coolly she says it. She ought to have told me about it!" repeated Sylvia, leaving her seat with a passionate spring, and standing at the window, her back to me.

"Sylvia," began I, pleadingly, "how could I know that it was anything to you?"

She made a little frantic gesture of impatience.

"Mattie!" she cried, "you have got me on the rack, but why need you torture me more than is necessary? Stay, though!" she added. "We may as well speak out, having said so much already. You think that during your illness I have employed myself by 'setting my cap,' as they say, at Mr. Luke Elphinstone, and that I am now disappointed. Is not that what you believe?"

"I will not say anything, Sylvia," I said.

"You have no right to oblige me to accuse you against my will."

"I thank you for your generosity," she said, bitterly; "but I will have the truth. What have you thought? What have you believed? Miss Pollard spoke of talk in the village. What have they dared to say? What have you heard? I will hear it from some one, so you may as well tell me."

"I heard some remarks from the servants," said I, "which I treated as idle nonsense, and silenced at once. I saw you and Luke sitting by the burn together this afternoon, and I spoke to Luke about it."

"You spoke to Luke about it," she echoed, in a choking voice. It seemed as if she could not clearly realise the meaning of what I said, unless she repeated my words. "You spoke to Luke about it. And what did he say?"

"He acknowledged that he had flirted a little," I said, "and treated the matter as a jest." Then there followed a long silence, while Sylvia stood in the window with her back to me, and the twilight gathered about her light figure.

At last she turned to me again. She was strangely flushed, and there were traces of suffering on her face. One could scarcely have recognised the gay pretty Sylvia.

"Why did you keep your engagement a secret from me, Mattie?" she said.

"It was Luke's desire," I said. "I promised him not to tell you of it till he gave me leave."

"I see; and then he behaves as he has done, and then he tells you that I have joined with him in a vulgar flirtation. He trusts to a woman's pride for silence between you and me, and he is right enough there. But I will tell you this much, Mattie, Luke asked me to be his wife before ever he could have been a lover of yours. Did I not tell you one day that at the time I promised to marry poor Dick, I liked another better than your brother? That other was Luke, and he knew it."

I was not surprised to hear this. I had guessed something of it before.

"He left me in great grief and anger," Sylvia went on, "but he came to me again one day last spring. He told me then that he had become a wealthy man, and he urged me to pay a visit to the Mill-house. I think I told you before how

I was starved for a little love in those days. I had just had a snubbing that very morning, and I was particularly lonely and sad. I believed it was in all sincerity that he led me to believe that he still had the hope to win me for his wife. I gave him a note to you, saying I should come, and I came."

"Which note he never delivered," I thought, remembering her unexpected arrival; but I let that pass.

"You may have mistaken his manner, Sylvia," I said.

"Mistaken!" she said. "Oh, you meek Mattie, how quietly you take all this! You are not a bit jealous, not a bit indignant. For shame, Mattie, to give your promise to a man you care nothing for! But it is a wise age. I should have thriven on my own wisdom before now, if Providence had not ordered things otherwise. If Luke were not rich, richer than that dashing soldier who was here this evening, looking as if he thought you an angel, instead of a mercenary little piece of clay, you would have nothing to do with him, not you. Gracious Heavens! what a pair of icicles you will be! But, Mattie, we will go to Eldergowan."

I was lying on a couch, and I had turned my face away from her. I could not bear to see her flashing eyes. The bitter gaiety of her voice was cruel enough. "Poor Sylvia," I thought, and "poor Mattie!" and "oh, why would not Luke return to his old love?" I had nothing to say aloud on the instant, and when I thought of something, and turned my head, Sylvia was gone.

I got up-stairs. Passing Sylvia's door, I listened, and fancied I heard a sob. But it was not likely. I could better imagine her with still that angry flush on her face, and that dry light in her eyes, sitting proud and straight, with her head high, than broken down and weeping. I thought it sore and hard that she might not be Mattie, and I might not be Sylvia, and free.

My room was full of silence and the cool green twilight, the stars twinkling serenely above the dim trees without, the window open, and all the out-door perfumes coming in. I hid my eyes in my arm on the window-sill, and felt my mother mourning over me. "Kind mother," I sighed, "you get little rest, for every day I am in sadder straits!"

I heard heavy feet coming along the gravel. My father, Mark, and Luke all came up the walk together. They were giving good night before the door, when a light foot went down the stairs, and I saw Sylvia appear on the steps.

"A note for your mother, Major Hatteraick," said her clear voice, and a little white waif went fluttering down into his hand.

"Mattie and I shall be delighted to go to Eldergowan."

I saw Mark's swift bright glance upward; but I retreated from the window, and laid myself trembling on my bed.

CHAPTER IX.

I SLEPT little that night. During the first hour after I laid my head upon my pillow I assured myself that I could not go to Eldergowan. But

as the night advanced, my ideas changed. For Sylvia's sake, I must dare to go. Did I not owe her something for the wrong that my silence had done her? I knew her secret now, and, knowing it, could I selfishly shut the door of her escape from the Mill-house? Having given up her situation to come to me, she had no home ready to receive her upon a day's notice. I could not send her to Eldergowan alone, and did I refuse to accompany her thither, how cruel and capricious would not my conduct appear? Oh yes, for Sylvia's sake I must go, and while there I would be honest and brave. Suffering lay before me, whichever way I turned; and if in it I could include a benefit to another, would it not be well? With the stars shining in at one's window, and dim boughs sleeping solemnly against the sky, it is easy to be heroic between the hours of dawn and midnight. And then, having made up my mind, I thought I should sleep, but the glamour of a brighter sun than ever shone over the Mill-house crept under my eyelids. The thought of no after-sorrow could keep down a thrill of joy at the surety that to-morrow I should see Eldergowan. But it was a feverish joy, struggling with fear and anguish. The lonely wheel of the beetling-house purred dolefully all the night, and the cocks crowed sad and shrill in the dawn.

I went down to breakfast in the morning, the first time for many weeks. Luke was sitting in the window, with a flushed angry face, screened from the room by a newspaper. I heard Sylvia's laugh before I opened the door. She was already in her place at the head of the table, in her white wrapper and nosegay. She was paler than usual; and when she stopped laughing for a minute, I saw a darkness round her eyes, which was something new in her face. But she went on laughing again, and when she laughed there was nothing to be observed about Sylvia but glow, and glitter, and enchantment. She was chatting to my father and putting him in a good humour, as she could do better than any one else, although when away from the charm of her presence he always spoke of her with a grudge. I could not clearly see a cause for her excessive mirth, though the subject of their talk was a pleasant one. Sylvia was extolling Major Hatteraick, and expressing her delight at the prospect of going to Eldergowan.

"He is a very fine fellow," growled my father, in his blunt way, "and he is old enough to be thinking of taking a wife. He seemed very anxious to get you to his mother's house. When you go to Eldergowan, Miss Sylvia, I think you ought to stay there."

Sylvia laughed another gay peal, and clapped her hands softly together in a rapture of fun.

"Would you give the bride away, Mr. Gordon?" she said. "And oh! what a pretty place Streamstown church would be for a wedding on a summer morning, with the sun coming down through all the little coloured windows on our heads!"

"I tell you what it is," said my father, with sudden warmth, "you and Mattie get married on the same day, and we'll have such doings as

shall make the country wonder. The workpeople shall have holiday, and the wheels shall rest. Eh! Miss Sylvia?"

At this moment I asked Sylvia, rather sharply, for a cup of tea, and Luke flung down his newspaper and came over to the table with a black frown on his face. Something had put him in a very bad humour that morning. Sylvia seemed the only one who appreciated my father's joke.

My father left the room first, and Sylvia followed, singing a little catch as she closed the door. I hastened out also, but Luke stopped me.

"What is the meaning," he said, "of this sudden visit to Eldergowan?"

"The meaning is," I answered, looking him full in the face, "that Sylvia wishes to go, and, of course, I am going with her."

He turned his back to me, and began to fidget with the blind, on pretence of drawing it up.

"Why does she wish to go?" he asked.

I was silent for some moments, not knowing how to answer this question. I watched his nervous fingers playing with the cord of the blind, and wondered at him. I felt that he was false, but I could not understand him.

"Why does she wish to go?" he repeated, impatiently.

"You can best answer that question yourself," I said, at last.

He wheeled round suddenly. "You have broken your word," said he; "you have told her of the engagement between you and me."

"Yesterday," I said, "you gave me a good character for truth. I am sorry to say I kept the secret; Miss Pollard enlightened her by accident."

"When?" he said. "Since yesterday evening?"

"Last night," I said.

"Meddling old fool!" he muttered under his breath.

Again I looked at him, wondering at the unaccountable meanness of his conduct.

"Luke," said I, "if you knew what I am thinking of you now, you would give me my liberty at once."

He smiled at me, with a sort of admiration in his eyes.

"There is a great deal of the child about you yet, Mattie," said he. "What is your terrible thought?"

"I have been hating you," I said.

"That is nonsense," he said. "I never did you any harm that you should hate me."

"You have done me harm," I said, "a great deal; and you have done Sylvia harm."

"Has she complained to you?" he said, with sudden anger and triumph struggling in his face. Just at this moment Sylvia passed under the window, to pluck some lavender from a bed close by, to lay amongst the linen she was packing in her trunk. A startling change passed over Luke's face when she appeared; he flushed up to the forehead, and his lip quivered.

"Four years ago," he said, huskily, "she cost me bitter suffering. I have been trying to punish her, but she is as heartless as ever. Let her go as she came. She shall not interfere between you and me. You are too good for me,

Mattie, I know you are; but I will not give you up, nor your father."

He rushed out of the room and down the path to the bridge, without once looking at Sylvia, who was coming in with her lavender; and we saw no more of him till after our return from Eldergowan. I followed Sylvia, who had passed him, smiling, on the steps. When I arrived up-stairs, her door was locked. I knocked, and there was no answer. Afterwards, when I coaxed my way in, she was packing her trunk with a dark face, and very few words for me. Good-bye had been said to our friendship; she could not forgive me.

I found Elsie in my own room, waiting for me in triumph, with a pile of white muslins, coloured cambries, dainty laces, bright ribbons, shoes with rosettes on them, and pretty morsels of jewellery which she had taken from my mother's old casket, and rubbed up with her kindly hands till they sparkled again in the sun. Her bairn had been covered up in ugly black the last time she went visiting, said Elsie; this time she should be as gay as a garden of posies. She took a simple delight in watching me dress myself in white, and tie a rose-coloured ribbon among my curls. She had little bits of gold and diamonds for my ears and throat; but "yon braw ring o' Luke's," she said, "has the bonniest glint o' them a'." I sighed a passionate sigh as I dropped my hand into the folds of my gown. I could not but see that these bright garnishings had made me a different creature. Little black Mattie might sit in the corner and cry over her sorrows; but this shining young woman looked like some one fit to be loved, some one with a right to walk out into the summer sunshine, and stretch forth her hand for her share of human happiness. And again the fruitless question, "Why had not I been Sylvia, why had not Sylvia been me?" rang its sharp changes on my heart; while Elsie chuckled and admired, hoping Mr. Luke would come back to take just one peep before I went off in my glory.

I was surely mad that day as we drove out into the wreathed and scented midsummer world, along the sunny roads, under the arching trees, and between the blossomed hedges, mad with the madness of nineteen years, from whose hands trouble drops of its own weight, while joy fills them with flowers at a moment's notice. I was mad to tremble with ecstasy when we turned into the avenue of Eldergowan, and the scent of the wild orange-blossoms stole to my senses; maddest of all when Mark Hatteraick handed me out of the carriage, and I stood by his side on the gravel, with the dear old house beaming down on me, with its sunny windows, and puffing welcomes from all its thrifty chimneys, with bright faces flashing out of the open door and down the steps, with voices of delight ringing, with dogs leaping and barking, and Mark holding my hand longer than he need have done, and looking at me and my pretty dress, my gay bonnet, and my little gold things, till I could not see for blushes, and got so dizzy, I did not know who was speaking to me at this side or that, but answered all at random and in confusion.

It was I who, instead of Sylvia, should have sat in the carriage, cold and pale as if happiness were dead, and we were driving to its funeral, tricked out in gala garments for a mockery. It was I who should have stood gravely indifferent, looking around without interest, like one setting lonely foot on an alien land—I who should have said, "Thank you, Major Hatteraick," stiffly, and talked to the sweet-faced old lady at the top of the steps without tremor or effusion. Sylvia was the stately banished princess, with her trouble wrapped about her in dignity; but, alas! I was only like a poor little caged mouse running gleefully back to its hole.

We did not find Eldergowan the quiet place I had left it two months before. There was more lively stir and bustle, more coming and going of visitors, a freshened vividness of colouring about the whole house; some water-colour paintings from this year's exhibition, and some new pink linings for the chintz-chalis curtains in the drawing-room, a tall crystal tazza for piling up pyramids of flowers on the hall table, a noble "Diana robing" to fill a nook on the gossip's landing, and be hung with the flitting jewels, showered through the coloured window by the sun of sunny afternoons—little novelties like these, the fruits of a visit of Major Hatteraick to London, gave the place an air of being newly swept, and garnished, as if in preparation for new scenes of delight, which the remaining summer days had yet in store. And gaieties already were projected, promising more excitement, if not more pleasure, than might be expected to be found in dreamy saunters in the garden, nutting rambles in the woods, and story-telling gatherings on the steps at sunset. The Eldergowan I had known had passed away, with my black gown and my peace of mind, and I could be thankful for visitors, for bustle, for many eyes; many voices, from amongst which one would not be missed, if it sometimes failed and dropped away; for much fun which could keep laughter on the lips, let the heart be never so sore.

For my little flash of delight faded away from me like a streak of winter sunshine, and every night I asked myself why had I come again to Eldergowan to wreck my life utterly for the sake of one who had already, in such a little while, exhausted the sorrow which I had looked upon with sympathy and awe? I had sounded her trouble and thought it fathomless, and, behold! the shallow fountain was already dried up. For Sylvia's fit of hardness and gloom passed off in a few days, and she threw herself into every plan for amusement with a zest and merriment that made her a favourite with every one she met with. She was queen of every festival, dance, and pic-nic, what not: She had but to lift her little finger and any one was ready to do her will. Who would not love her—gay, witty, melting, wilful, with only that fierce hard look for me when nobody was by?

Sylvia was at enmity with me, yet it was only at times that I cried out the injustice that she was heartless and suffered nothing. I, who knew her, saw the hectic on her cheek, and heard the discord in her voice. She suffered in the sing-

ing of songs, in the pauses of the dance, at night when her door was shut.

Our rooms opened out of one another, but the door between us was kept fast closed. I could not have dared to creep to her bedside saying "Poor Sylvia!" And I knew she would sooner have thrown dust upon my head and sent me wrapped in a sheet to do penance on the highways, than have turned the handle of that lock and stolen an arm round my neck, whispering courage in the darkness. She was at enmity with me, and she did not disguise it. I had wronged her once in my secret engagement to Luke, and again it seemed that I offended in the attraction that kept Mark Hatteraick at my side. I often wondered whether it was in a spirit of coquetry that she desired to draw his homage to herself, or whether she had seen more than any other eyes could see, and, regarding me with angry contempt, was endeavouring to punish me. But one night at last she did visit me in my room.

There was full moon that night, and no strangers were with us. Sylvia sat out on the steps with a light scarf round her head, singing softly in the pauses of the nightingales. One song after another made the night more still, till all the moonlit world seemed intent on listening; the soft greenish air on which the scents hung breathless, the yellow light sleeping on the house-front and on the flats of the steps, the velvety shadows that lurked about the dim wrapt trees. First we had passionate ballads, and then dreamy melodies on which the very soul of melancholy had spent itself. Now the clear mellow voice soared among the stars, which seemed to flash and reverberate for sympathy, and now it fell softly to the level of the roses, with a special cooing note for the little baby-buds folded under the mother-leaves close by.

Mark was smoking somewhere in the walks outside, and we had no light in the drawing-room. Mrs. Hatteraick had fallen asleep on a couch, and I was resting on another in the window, from which I saw the dimly swelling swards with a faint glory hovering above their breasts, the shadowed woods lying with dusky shoulders against the stars, and the notches of light and pools of shadow that exaggerated the grotesque carving of the stonework outside the window.

"Mattie!" whispered Polly, pulling my arm. "They are making butter in the dairy. Come and print some little pats."

"Hush! Polly," said Nell, in a motherly way, spreading a shawl over my feet. "Mattie has a headache. Come along, and I will make pats with you." And the little girls left me alone in quietness.

Just then, Sylvia, who had been lingering about the open hall door, sat down on the steps and began her singing. By-and-by, I saw a dark figure emerge from the trees, and Mark came towards the house. Through the open doors, I heard Sylvia saying to him on the steps, "They are all asleep in-doors, and I am trying to amuse myself." Then she asked him a question. Did he ever hear a song called so-and-so? No? Well then it was very pretty; it went like this.

And so she went on singing, and he remained listening. Sometimes the song ceased for a minute or so, and I heard her voice in speaking tones. I grew restless—the room was hot, the couch hard. I would go away to bed. I passed out to the hall, where the fresh air and moonlight came freely through the open door. I stood in the shadows and saw a striking picture—Sylvia, sitting on the steps like a beautiful yellow-haired gipsy, with her light dress gathered about her, and a half-faded scarlet kerchief looped under her chin. Mark leaned against the opposite railings.

"Oh! you do not like that," she said, breaking off abruptly in the middle of a refrain, and looking up brightly.

"Yes," he said, with his good-natured smile, "it is very sweet; go on."

The melody turned to discord, and my heart began to burn. "Mattie," said Sylvia, suddenly, "come out here, and do not lurk in the dark like a spirit of evil. The night is glorious."

"Come here, Mattie," said Mark, softly; but I said, "No, I am going to bid you good night;" and I retreated into the shadows, and went away up-stairs out of reach of the sweet echoes, taking with me mending pains at the heart. And yet it was all nothing, I told myself; nothing that Sylvia should look so fair, and sing bewitchingly; nothing that Mark should stand by and see and listen: and if each of these nothings had been a very important something, still it were nothing to me. I crushed my throbbing head into the cold pillow and tried to sleep; and after a time I must have succeeded, for I did not hear the people in the house settling to rest, the voices on the lobbies, nor the doors shutting.

The first thing I heard was the opening of the door of communication between my room and Sylvia's, and, starting up, I saw Sylvia walking across the floor in the moonshine, with a dark cloak wrapped around her, and all her yellow hair lying loose over her shoulders. She shocked me with her sudden appearance, as she had shocked me on the first night I had seen her in the Mill-house. She reminded me, as then, of my mother's wandering spirit. I sat up and spoke to her with irritation. Why had she startled me out of my tranquil sleep to uneasy recollections? We were not good enough friends to hold those nightly talks which have such an irresistible fascination for some girls.

"What do you want, Sylvia?" said I. "Why have you wakened me?"

She had seated herself on the corner of my bed facing me. The moonlight from the window fell on my face, leaving hers in shadow; only rippling down the edges of the long rich hair that fell to one side in a pale stream over her arm.

"I did not wish to trouble you, Mattie," she said, humbly. "I came to talk to you a little. Let us be better friends than we have been."

"We are pretty good friends," said I; "as good as we can be, I think. What can we have to talk about? I do not want to lose my sleep."

"You do not sleep so well at nights," she

said. "I can hear you fidgeting through the door. Mattie, you have a sorrow that you are keeping all to yourself. Open your heart and talk to me, and you will be the better for it."

"What has put such an absurd idea in your head?" I said. "Go away to your own room, Sylvia, please, and let me go to sleep."

"Nay," she said, "I will not be shaken off so easily. I will tell you about it, then, if you will not tell me. You are engaged to marry Luke Elphinstone. He loves some one else better than you, and you do not like him. I thought so before; now I know it."

I did not reply to the first part of the accusation; I thought only of keeping my trouble to myself.

"Why do you say I do not like him?" I said. "I never gave you the right. I will not allow you to say it."

"You are making a confession now," she said. "You defend yourself: you do not notice that I said, Luke loves another better than you. Yet I made you jealous to-night by singing a little song for Major Hatteraick. Ah, Mattie! you love Mark, and Mark loves you. I have tried him, I have sounded him, I have made you jealous for your own good. He is noble, he is worth a woman's devotion. He——"

"Stop, Sylvia!" cried I. "I will not hear another word;" and I pressed my hands over my ears.

She seized my wrists in her strong white fingers, and brought down my hands, and held them one upon another in my lap.

"You must release Luke," she said, vehemently, looking in my face with passionate eyes, half craving, half commanding.

"Impossible!" I said. "The engagement cannot be broken. As for the rest, Major Hatteraick is nothing to me, and I am nothing to him. You imagine a hundred foolish things. Go away to your bed."

I never saw such a look of utter scorn as came into her face as I spoke. She drew away her hands from mine, and half turned her back upon me during some moments of silence. But afterwards she turned to me, softened again, and began speaking sweetly and sorrowfully.

"Mattie dear," she said, "I am older than you, and I have more experience of people and things. What is your reason for acting so strangely? Luke is rich; Mark is a little poor, they say. Is that it? Do you think of those things? I did once; I do not now. It is a great mistake when women do not know at first what women are made of. If one is content at her heart, what a little thing will make her happiness—a step on the floor, a voice up-stairs. I have seen a poor wife sing for joy over a tattered jacket. If a woman has given the salt out of her life, what will satisfy her? Not jewels nor fine dresses, nor gaieties nor luxuries. Take the joy, Mattie, that is waiting for you, and turn your back on the emptiness, the thorns, the heart-sickness. Mattie dear——"

Her voice melted away, and her fingers coaxed themselves in among mine again. But the woe that had gathered to my heart made

me sullen. I closed my mouth on the troubles that would not bear to be let loose. Why should I speak, to embitter my after life with shame? I drew my hand away from hers, and turned my face to the wall.

"I never told you I did not like Luke," I said, "and I never told you I liked any one else. I cannot break my engagement."

She sprang from her seat on the bed. I did not look round to see her, but I heard the anger in her voice, as she spoke her parting words.

"Go your wicked way, then," she said to me, "but no blessing will go with you. I have stooped very low, begging for your happiness and my own. It is the last time. Good night."

Then I heard her door shutting.

CHAPTER X.

AT breakfast next morning there was some discussion about getting up charades, to be followed by a ball on the same night, at Eldergowan. Nell would like to be a princess, Polly would dearly love to be dressed up like an old market-woman. Mrs. Hatteraick said Sylvia would make a perfect Mary Stuart; and Mattie, why Mattie might be transformed into an Italian peasant. But the words must be chosen, said Uncle Mark, before the parts could be cast; and still more was it necessary that the resources of Eldergowan in the way of properties should be ascertained, before any other steps should be taken.

So, after breakfast, Mrs. Hatteraick took me up-stairs with her to an odd little attic where lumber was kept. This was a little room at the end of a long upper passage, nestling under the eaves of the western gable, a little room where there was a range of tall black ghoull-like presses, and cavernous chests of drawers with grotesque brazen handles; with an old cradle; with mouse-holes; with pictures leaning against the walls in tarnished frames, from which mysterious features peered dimly into the daylight of the present day; and with a lattice window rustily bolted, from which you looked down into the heart of the Eldergowan woods, beyond them to moors and hills, and further still into regions of indescribable cloud and sunshine—a landscape full of a wild glory, a stream flashing here, a streak of vivid purple there, an amber valley printed with moving shadows, a lazy cloud just waking to the sun along a frowning ridge of rocks.

Mrs. Hatteraick unlocked her presses, and their contents were dragged forth to the light—ancient robes of faded satin with short waists and tight skirts, tarnished brocades, Indian scarves, velvet turbans, embroidered shoes, plumes and wreaths, and a hundred fantastic fripperies belonging to a bygone day. These were duly examined, and then Mrs. Hatteraick laid open some of the deep drawers, and showed me stores of goodly linen and damask, also rare old laces, untouched webs of delicate India muslins, and exquisite painted gauzes, handkerchiefs fine as cobweb loaded with the richest needlework, curious fans carved in ivory and various costly woods, with many other such

feminine treasures, which she told me were all to be appropriated by Mark's wife, whenever that person should make her appearance at Eldergowan.

"She will be welcome when she comes, Mattie," said the dear old lady, gazing at me in her sweet wistful way, putting her soft hand under my chin and drawing my face to hers for a kiss.

"Provided you approve of her, Mrs. Hatteraick," I said, gaily. "Mothers are hard to please for their sons. I dare say you would like a princess out of a fairy tale, with all the good gifts on earth."

I wanted to make a longer speech, but my breath failed me.

"No, my love," said Mrs. Hatteraick, smiling. "I shall only desire some one young, and fresh, and warm hearted, and sweet tempered, such a one as I know my Mark will choose; with a kind stateliness, with a gentle pride, a lady at all points. Nay, my darling, do not blush so terribly and look so disturbed. I did not mean to run too fast, nor to probe too deeply."

"Mrs. Hatteraick——!" I began, desperately, with all my confession on my tongue, but at the same moment the door was dashed open, and in came Nell and Sylvia, followed by Polly and a pet dog. The dog, dashing in amongst the outspread fineries, was noisily ejected on the passage, and up came Major Mark to know what all the scuffling and whining was about. The dog being disposed of, there followed an examination of the articles lying around, and a discussion as to what might and what might not be available. Sylvia wound a yellow scarf round my head, and threw a scarlet mantle over my shoulders. Mark picked up a blue velvet turban and perched it on his head, while Polly, eager to make new discoveries, dived into a press which had as yet not been ransacked, and dragged forth in triumph a rusty-white satin gown of ancient pattern, and, slipping into it, began dancing about the room, crying,

"Grandmamma's wedding dress! Grandmamma's wedding dress!"

"Polly! Polly!" remonstrated grandmamma, gently.

"Is it really your wedding dress, Mrs. Hatteraick?" said Sylvia, catching the little flying figure in her extended arms, and examining the robe with interest. "Dear, dear! what a funny gown! Mattie, how should you like to be married in this? Mrs. Hatteraick, you must lend it to Mattie for a pattern; she will want one soon, you know."

"Mattie want one soon!" echoed Mrs. Hatteraick, looking from me to Sylvia, and from Sylvia to me, in perplexity. Then there followed a sudden silence, and every eye was turned on me, as if they were all waiting for me to contradict this extravagant assertion, which could only have been made in jest.

"Have I made a blunder, Mattie?" said Sylvia, innocently. "Is it a secret here? Why, I thought every one knew of your engagement to Mr. Luke Elphinstone."

"I had never spoken of it here, Sylvia," I

said, "but it does not signify;" and I felt an icy indifference creeping into my voice and eyes as I spoke to her.

"Is this jest or earnest, Mattie?" said Mrs. Hatteraick, looking at me strangely.

"It is earnest, Mrs. Hatteraick," I said; and then I picked up some white flowers and began decorating Polly to make her look still more like a bride, putting my head on this side and that as if criticising coolly the effect of what I was doing; but I might have been sticking my roses in the child's mouth for aught that I could see to the contrary.

I had felt Mark's eyes upon me all this time; but I had not ventured to glance at him. Now he turned to the window and stood some time looking down on that landscape I have described. At last he said suddenly:

"Mattie, will you come down with me to the garden for a few minutes? I have something to say to you."

I could not find a word to give in answer; but I dropped the remainder of the flowers in Polly's lap, and turned to follow him.

"Are you going in that costume?" said Sylvia. I took off the yellow turban with which she had decked me, and threw it at her feet, slipped the gaudy mantle from my shoulders, and went down-stairs after Mark.

"Mattie," said he, when we got into the open air, "how long have you been engaged to Mr. Elphinstone?"

"Six months," I said.

"Then you were engaged to him before you came here first?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not tell us—tell my mother? Why did you keep it a secret?"

"I had a right to do so, if I pleased," I said.

"You had not the right," he burst forth, in a voice and with a face that reminded me of the day the little boy had been kicked in the stable-yard. "Answer me truly, Mattie, have I hidden from you, from any one, how I have been setting my heart upon you? Have you not known all this time that I have been loving you with all my strength?"

I said "Yes," and I tried to say it coldly and hardly, for I felt tears coming, and I feared not what might happen if I let them fall. But I looked up at the moment, and I think my eye must have told him something, for he checked his anger and spoke tenderly.

"Mattie, my own love," he said, "you are unhappy. There is something very wrong in all this. Trust me, tell me about it; can we not set it right?"

He held his large strong loving hand towards me as he spoke, and with all the passion of my soul I yearned to lay my face against it and pour out all the troubles of my heart, as freely as a little child to its mother; but the madness of such an action stared me in the face all the

time, and I could no more have done it than I could have died of my will on the instant.

"Will you not trust me? Can we not set it right?" he said again; but I said "No," in the same cold way, and turned from him. My arms hung like lead by my side. I could not lift one finger to detain the kind eager hand extended towards me, till at last it was withdrawn in anger, and I saw him turn and stride away—away from me, among the trees, without looking back—out of sight.

I fled into the house. Hurrying across the hall, I met Mrs. Hatteraick, who put her arms round me and drew me into the nearest room. Then I broke down, and with her motherly hand on my hair, I cried on my knees with my head in her lap, wept and wept, till I thought I must have wept all the youth out of my life. I spoke nothing to the dear old friend; her soft soothing and hushings sounded as if from across a raging sea. I could take no comfort. I do not know exactly when it was that there arose a cry of "Mattie! Mattie!" all through the house, as it seemed; outside the door, and on the stairs. But, at last, several people came into the room at once, and were not at all surprised to see me crying so, telling me to hope for the best, assuring me that my father was not dead, that the doctor gave hope of his recovery; saying that the carriage was at the door, one bringing me my hat, and another my mantle. And before many minutes had passed I found myself driving hastily home to the Mill-house, with a clear knowledge that my father had got a stroke of paralysis, and lay in danger of death.

I found by his bedside two kind friends, Doctor Strong and Miss Pollard. Then began a weary period of watching and nursing, during which the shadow of death hung over the Mill-house. All selfish unruly thoughts were obscured in the darkness, and the sore heart was thankful to mistake one pain for another in the confusion of its growing sorrows.

It was Miss Pollard who beckoned me out to the lobby one day to give me the latest news of the country-side.

"Miss Sylvia is engaged to be married to Major Hatteraick, my dear!" she said. "Goodness me, what a coquette that girl has been! And now to think of her settling down in Eldergowan at last!"

I almost pushed my little friend down the stairs. I called to Luke, and bade him see her home through the village. Why should I hate her, who had never meant me ill? I said good night kindly, and went back and shut the door of my sick-room, and gathered myself under the shelter of the shadow of death.

MR. CHARLES DICKENS'S READINGS.

MR. CHARLES DICKENS will read at Warrington on Thursday the 2nd; and at St. James's Hall, London, for the last time this season, on Monday the 13th of May.

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